



LECTURES
ON THE
PARABLES;
TO
WHICH ARE ADDED,
SOME OCCASIONAL DISCOURSES.

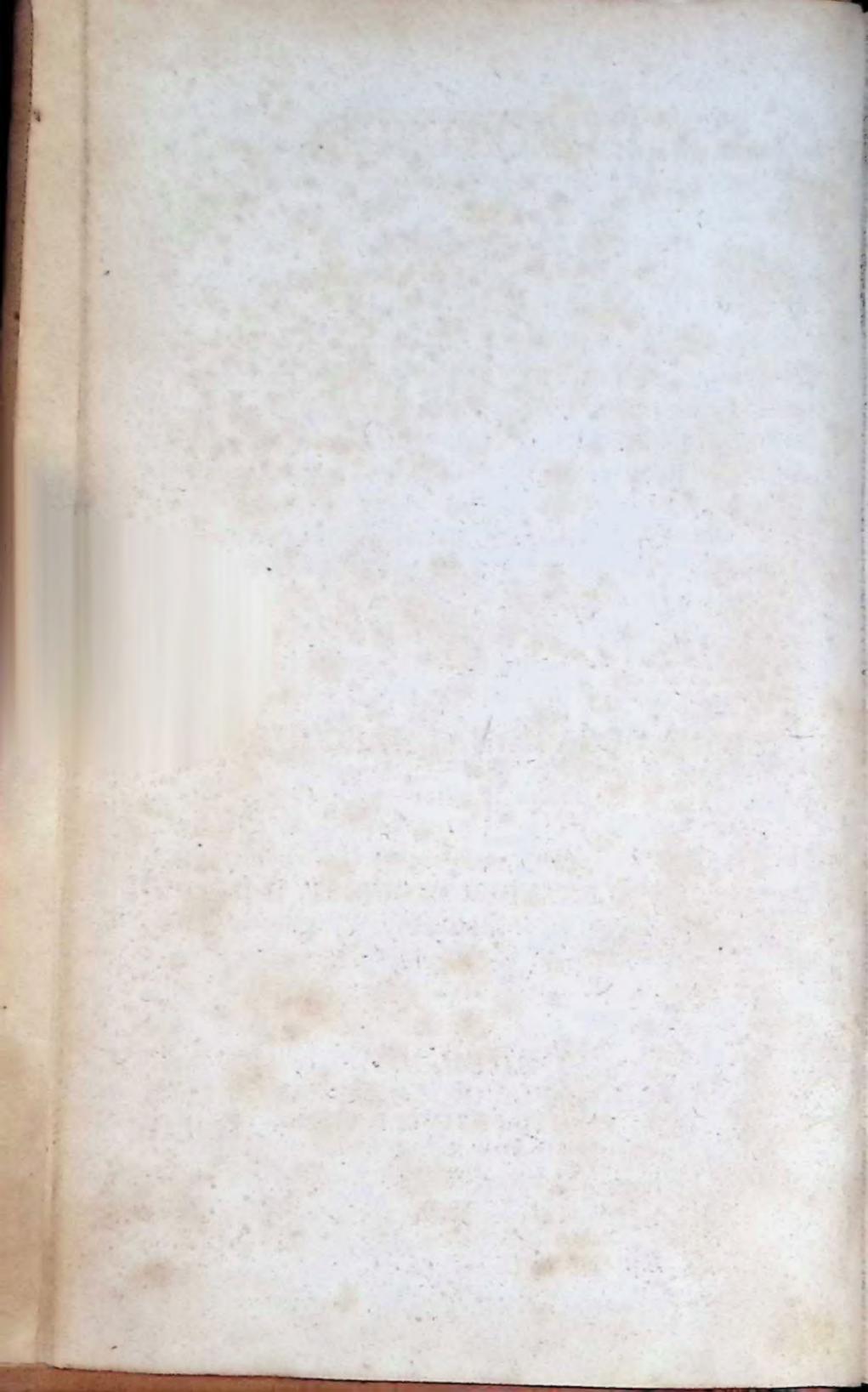
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SALEM, N. Y.

PRINTED BY JAMES B. GIBSON.

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1820.

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thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained besides them five talents more.—His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.—He also that had received two talents came and said, lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents besides them.—His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.—Then he which had received the one talent came and said, lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:—And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talents in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.—His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knowest that I reap where I sowed not, and gathered where I have not strawed:—Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangeis, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.—Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.—For unto every one that hath, shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.—And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.—P. 100.

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LECTURE I.



THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

MATTHEW XIII. 18.—23.

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while : for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

He also that received seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word ; and the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

But he that received seed into the good ground, is he that heureth the word ; and understandeth it ; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.

THE parable to which our Saviour here alludes was delivered on a former occasion, and is contained in the 4th 5th 6th 7th and 8th verses of this chapter ; and now not merely for the gratification, but also for the profit of his disciples he resumes the consider-

ation of the same parable, and particularly illustrates and enforces it. To promote the temporal and immortal interests of man was not only the design for which the Son of God appeared in our world, but it was his cordial delight, and constant employment. He was ever ready by night or by day to impart knowledge to the ignorant, to satisfy every doubt of the anxious, humble enquirer, and to minister joy to the dejected spirit.

This divine teacher commences his exposition by earnestly inviting the attention of his disciples, "hear ye the parable of the sower." Indeed all diligence on the part of the preacher must be unprofitable without a correspondent diligence on the part of the hearer, and it requires as great earnestness and intensioness of mind to hear with profit as to speak with propriety. How frequently therefore is that admonition repeated by our Lord, "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear," and John the Evangelist urges again and again, "he that hath an ear to hear, let him hear "what the spirit saith unto the churches." But the word *hearing* does not import merely a slight, or momentary attention to a message which is delivered ; it requires us so to attend as to comprehend it in our hearts, to retain it in our memories, and reduce it to practice in our lives. The Apostle therefore mentions that we "ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which are spoken, lest at any time we should let them slip." And permit me to remark, that the best preparation for a suitable and profitable hearing of the word, is

a deep impression of its importance, and of our own infinite and eternal interest in it. He who comes to the house of God realizing that the truths to be delivered are a message from Jehovah, and that they involve his own eternal interests ; that " if they are not the savour of life unto life, they must be the savour of death unto death ;" that if they are not instrumental in his salvation, they must tend to his greater damnation ; he who comes to the house of God with these impressions will not, cannot be an inattentive hearer. Sooner would a man tortured with pain slight the overtures of the Physician who stands with a remedy in his hand and offers him instant relief, or the man pining with hunger, trifle or sport while the nourishing food was presented and offered freely for his acceptance, or the man under sentence of death, wantonly slight the sentence of pardon when proposed upon condition of his asking it, than the sinner make light of the message of salvation who believes that there is a heaven and a hell to which he must shortly be adjudged according to his works. Therefore, all the drowsiness which may be often noticed in the sanctuary, all the sloth, the lethargy, the inattention of the hearers of the Gospel arises from the blindness of the understanding and the unbelief of the heart. Men do not give *the more earnest heed to the things which are spoken*, because they do not fully believe them, and are not suitably impressed with their importance. There was probably another reason why our Lord so particularly calls the attention of the

Apostles to this parable. They were soon to go forth in the capacity of sowers ; they were to be employed in diffusing the Gospel among the nations, and he informs them of the various success of their message ; that some whom they should hereafter address, would "believe the things that were spoken," and some would neglect or despise. No preacher of righteousness was perhaps ever instrumental in the salvation of all whom he was called to address. While our Saviour was delivering a parable for the instruction, and admonition of his church in all ages, he was also preparing the minds of his Apostles for their future trials ; he was forewarning them that they must not be discouraged, although many of their hearers would not believe their *report* ; although all who were Israelites by profession should not be gathered by their means.

"When any one heareth the word of the kingdom." The doctrines to be announced by Apostles and their successors in office are denominated the word of the *kingdom*, to shew us what should constitute the great, the almost exclusive theme of our preaching, those truths which relate to the spiritual kingdom, those doctrines which are immediately adapted to fit our hearers for becoming useful members of the church on earth, and to prepare them for the employments and the joys of the church in heaven. If the spiritual teacher departs from the purity and simplicity of the Gospel ; if he is privately occupied in investigating other subjects, or preaches other subjects from the pulpit, then he devi-

ates from the example of our Lord, that “perfect minister of the sanctuary,” and loses sight of the very nature of his office. The ambassadors of Jesus are therefore called *stewards of the mysteries of God* as an admonition that their time and talents ought to be employed explaining these mysteries and applying them; diligently studying them in their closets and preaching them from the pulpit. All their doctrines ought to be derived from the living oracles as their origin, and should all tend to the glory of God in the edification of his church as their end. Paul determined “to know nothing in the Corinthian church, but Jesus Christ and him crucified.” When Moses and Elias came down from heaven to earth the exclusive theme of their discourse, was “that decease which should be accomplished at Jerusalem,” and when Angels appeared in the capacity of preachers to the Shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem, they announced these “good tidings of great joy, that unto us a Saviour was born, even Christ the Lord.”

But however glorious this *word of the kingdom* is in itself, and however interesting to us, there are some who *understand it not*; they do not discern the excellence of the scheme of human redemption through the cross of Jesus the Saviour; they do not discover it as worthy of God, as reflecting glory on all his perfections, and fully suited to the miseries and wants of fallen man; they do not experimentally feel its power transforming them into the image of the *first born*, purifying their

hearts, mortifying their affections to the present world, and raising them to objects divine and eternal. "They receive not the truth in the love of it that they may be saved : they are mere hearers of the word, but not doers of it ;" it never duly influences their hearts, nor powerfully reforms their lives, and consequently is attended with no lasting effect. All the knowledge of such hearers being only superficial and speculative, is not saving in its tendency, for *the wicked one cometh and taketh it away*. The seed which lies naked on the surface of the ground ; which was never covered with the soil, nor incorporated with it by spreading its roots deep and wide, this seed is a ready prey to the first bird which passes along ; it lies exposed on the earth, and even tempts the eye of the traveller, and having no roots to fasten it in the earth is easily carried off. It is mentioned here that the *wicked one cometh*. The enemy who picks up, and carries off this seed is the devil, who is emphatically called that *wicked one* ; he is malignantly and implacably opposed to all that is good ; he was the first, so far as we know, who raised the standard of rebellion in the universe, by refusing submission to the law of his Creator ; he was probably the instrument of seducing his compeers, other angels to revolt ; it was through his artifices that our first parents were tempted to trample on the command of their Creator, by eating the forbidden fruit, and now, impelled by the malignity of his nature, and encouraged by his former success in impiety he remains unwea-

ried in doing mischief. As he manifested his enmity against God by first tempting man to apostatise ; he manifests the same enmity still, by exerting all his influence to prevent our return to our duty. He is represented as coming and taking away the seed : he *cometh*, wherever ministers *come* to instruct, and admonish and exhort, the devil *comes* to prevent the efficacy of their instructions, and admonitions, and exhortations ; he is present in this assembly this moment : he is "not far from any one of you ;" he knows your predominant lusts, and aims at exciting them ; he knows your besetting sin, and offers a temptation most suited to succeed with you, to divert your attention from the word which you hear, and from the great things which belong to your peace. As the faithful minister of the gospel studies the different dispositions of his hearers, and endeavors to bring forth out of the divine treasure, truths which are calculated to impress, this *wicked one* studies their dispositions, and endeavors to suggest temptations which are calculated to prevent this impression.

This passage suggests to us that the devil is most obstinately and maliciously opposed to the influence of the word preached upon the souls of the hearers. This gospel is emphatically called the *glorious gospel*, or rather the *gospel of the glory of God* because it is eminently suited to advance his glory in the salvation of sinners, and therefore the devil, being the incorrigible enemy of Jehovah's glory, is also the enemy of his gospel, and

thus uses every artifice either to prevent men from reading and hearing it, or to prevent its efficacy whenever read or heard. "The God of this world hath blinded the minds of men, lest the light of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, should shine into them." One he endeavors to rock asleep and thus to keep the word from entering his ears. Another he aims at amusing with the pleasing dream of future gratification or gain, and thus lures his attention from the message as soon as it is heard. Others he attempts to persuade that it is time enough hereafter to repent, and reform, and "work out their salvation," and thus with the Roman governor they dismiss their anxious thoughts to a more convenient time. Beloved hearers, how affecting is the consideration that this fallen, foul spirit is now one of our assembly; that he was perhaps the first to enter this consecrated house, and will be the last in going out; that he hovers around from seat to seat, and from heart to heart; that the moment I address you he aims at destroying the efficacy of the address, *picking up*, as the parable expresses it, *picking up* the incorruptible seed as soon as it falls in the heart: and as the angels of heaven rejoice when one of you repents, these fiends of hell exult when one of you goes on in your impenitence, hardening your hearts against God. As you regard your eternal peace, be not *ignorant of the devices of this wicked one*; be not indolent in opposing his temptations; "resist the devil and he will flee from you;" look to the Lord

Jesus the Captain of salvation for strength to "arm yourselves against" his assaults : " He spoiled principalities and powers," and you also shall overcome by a humble reliance on his aid.

Some of the seed scattered by the spiritual sower *fell upon stony places*. This is designed to represent that class who hear the word, and receive it with a momentary joy. It is well known, that seed which drops in stony places where the soil is shallow, and usually warm is first in springing up, and presenting its blade to the eye of the beholder. But as the earth is shallow, and destitute of that moisture which is requisite for nourishing the roots, the blade, which had appeared, afterwards withers and languishes under the influence of the scorching sun. This fact in the natural world is an affecting representation of many who have a name in the church. They receive the word of life with an air of satisfaction ; they are pleased to hear of Jehovah's mercy in providing a Saviour for guilty man ; they feel some emotions of wonder and gratitude in hearing that Jesus died as a sacrifice to his Father's justice, and thus obtained eternal redemption for his people ; they are pleased with the offers of pardon and life through his substitution and sufferings, and hope that they themselves may become partakers of this great salvation ; they are charmed with that account which the scriptures afford of the felicities of heaven, and feel a desire to become sharers of that felicity ; through the influence of the word and the

common workings of the gracious spirit, they experience a degree of sorrow for the disorders, and impieties of their past lives, particularly for their neglect of the ordinances of religion, and they secretly form resolutions of amending their ways and living more entirely for God. Such attainments may be made by the hearers of the gospel without any change of heart, or preparation for heaven. The prophet Isaiah mentions some in his generation who “sought the Lord daily, and delighted to know his ways, and forsook not his ordinances, and delighted in approaching to God, yet their hearts went after their covetousness.” Our Saviour also speaking of John the Baptist, mentions that he was a “burning and a shining light, and that many of the Jews for a season rejoiced in his light,” but they afterwards forsook both him and his doctrine. And these Jews in the days of Isaiah, and in the days of John, are a representation of multitudes in every age. They are affected in some degree with the ministry of the word, and feel a momentary impulse of joy, but having no root in themselves, they *endure only for a time.* The impression is made chiefly on their fancies and affections without any solid, rational conviction on their understanding; they have not a thorough sense of sin in its nature and consequences; they are not deeply humbled on account of their iniquities; their hearts are not duly softened by displays of the divine mercy as it shines through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and therefore all their emotions

of sorrow for sin, of love to God, of joy under the means of grace are of short duration: In hearing the word of salvation they have not actually embraced that Jesus whom the word exhibits, and thus like a branch not really united to the vine, they may seemingly bud and blossom, but they bring forth no fruits of righteousness unto perfection. It is this which constitutes the real distinction between the christian and the formal professor. The former really closes with Jesus for pardon and life, resting on his sacrifice for the forgiveness of every sin, on his righteousness for a free and full acceptance with the Father, on his grace for sanctification of heart and life, on his spirit for direction, and such cannot possibly fall away: they "hold the head," as the apostle expresses it, "from which the whole body have nourishment ministered, and groweth up to perfection," but the latter resting on a few pangs of remorse as genuine repentance, on some transient impulses of delight under the word as real, spiritual joy, soon *lose their first love*, and apostatise from their holy profession. Just as the stream must dry up which has no connexion with a fountain, or as a branch must wither and decay which is not actually united to the vine, so the hearer of the word who stops short of union to the Son of God; who has never attained to fellowship with him in the atonement of his death, in the virtue of his resurrection and intercession come short of salvation; he must lose his soul in the end, and frequently loses his profession in the present

world ; for when *tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word he is offended.* To be pointed at by the finger of scorn for their adherence to Jesus and his cause ; to give up their former companions with whom they had mingled in the pleasures of the world ; to be vilified as weak enthusiasts, or as gross hypocrites, as either professing sincerity which they do not feel, or as under the influence of a disordered imagination is more than they are able to bear, they consider the sacrifice too great to be made for the sake of religion, and thus they give up one part of their profession after another, until they totally apostatise. That very *tribulation and persecution for righteousness' sake,* which is instrumental in the spiritual growth of the righteous ; by which their corruptions are mortified, their attachment to the world is lessened, and their desires after God and glory are increased, these very tribulations are means of perdition to the empty professor. The same sun which scorches and withers the blade that springs up on stony places without root, fosters and nourishes the blade which is deeply rooted in the earth. The same gale of wind which oversets the ship without ballast, carries more speedily into the harbor the vessel which is properly ballasted ; the same blast which blows over the rotten, decayed tree, tends to establish the living tree ; to make it strike its roots deeper and wider into the earth ; and so the same storm of *persecution for the sake of the Gospel,* in which the hypocrite is driven away from ordinances and from the profession.

of religion, only drives the true christian to adhere more closely and constantly to that Jesus who is a *shelter* from the storm, and a *covert* from the tempest. It causes him to exclaim with David under his afflictions, "thou Jehovah, art a shield for me, my glory, and the lifter up of mine head ; thou art my rock, my deliverer, and shield, in whom I trust." The apostle addressing the Philippians exhorts them "in nothing to be terrified by their dversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you, he says, of salvation and that from God : For it is given you in behalf of Christ not only to believe, but also to suffer for his sake." He mentions other christians who had "received joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a more enduring substance," and with respect to himself he had this confidence, that "his light afflictions which were but for a moment only worked for him a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory."

We are taught from this passage, that persecution must be expected by the followers of the Lamb. This tribulation may be different in different ages, sometimes the righteous are merely derided, and mocked ; sometimes they are misrepresented in their motives, and conduct, and sometimes they are called *to resist even unto blood*, but some degree of persecution for righteousness' sake must be expected : *the seed of the serpent* will be always emitting its venom in one form or another against *the seed of the woman*. And this hated, this contempt of the righteous which is

manifested by the profane, does not arise from any thing which they see in them as men, but for what they see in them as christians. It is explicitly mentioned that "tribulation or persecution ariseth for the word's sake," that is for our profession of the *word* and our adherence to its doctrines and duties. "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The followers of Jesus may possess every qualification which is requisite for recommending the man: Their natural tempers may be amiable and obliging, their disposition may be generous, their standing in society respectable; they may be just in their dealings, "rendering to all their due;" they may be willing to spare of their earthly substance for supporting the poor, and be ready to every good work, but although these endowments may soften the rage, they will not conciliate the affections of worldly men. In the same proportion, as any individual resembles the Lord Jesus Christ, in that very proportion will he or she be secretly hated by an irreligious world. That "*carnal mind which is enmity against God*," cannot feel emotions of friendship to his image when it shines in the face of man. Learn, therefore, dearly beloved brethren, "to count the cost" of your religious profession. You must either be loved of the Father and hated by the world, or owned and loved by the world and despised of the Father. As ye "cannot serve God and mammon," neither

can ye possess the esteem and affection of both at the same time. But recollect for your encouragement, "he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. If you suffer with Jesus, you shall also reign with him; if ye be dead with him, ye shall also live with him; if ye are persecuted for righteousness' sake, happy are you for the spirit of God and of glory resteth upon you." And would any rational, reflecting person now hearing me barter his soul and eternal life for the smiles of vain, capricious, perishing mortals; smiles which you may not live to enjoy to-morrow, and which, should you live until to-morrow, may be changed into scorn and derision.

Permit me also to notice another truth obviously suggested from this passage, that all apostacies in the church may be traced to a formal, superficial profession as the source. When we see the visible members of the church "turning aside from the holy commandment" and walking in the courses of this world, we may conclude with absolute confidence that the defect is wholly in themselves. Instead of inferring from these instances that there is no reality in religion, no excellence in her institutions, no *joy unspeakable* in holding fellowship with Jesus the sinner's friend, we ought rather to conclude that these back-sliders never felt the power of his grace. They may, as the apostle expresses it, "have tasted the good word of God," but they never experienced its renovating, and sanctifying, and consoling influence. Even when they "had a name to live, they were spiritually

dead. No blast either from earth or hell will ever blow out the lamp which has been lighted up by the Holy Ghost and replenished with oil from Jesus the ever living Head. "They went out from us," says the holy Evangelist speaking of some who apostatized in his age, "they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

As the sower went forth to sow, some seeds fell among thorns. This represents the man who heareth the word and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. Man in departing from the living God, departed from the true felicity and glory of his nature; he left the real fountain of joy, and is now become the sport of ten thousand anxieties and toils; he looks for happiness, not in the Creator, but in the creature, and is therefore perpetually disappointed. He is eagerly asking, "what shall I eat, or what shall I drink, or wherewithall shall I be clothed," to the neglect of infinitely important realities? *The care of this world, says our Lord in the parable, choketh the word.* A certain portion of attention to the concerns of this world is unavoidable and justifiable. While we stand in the relation of parents, we must provide for our families; while we remain members of the church, we must contribute to the support of its ordinances; while we are connected with civil society, we must afford our aid for maintaining the

poor, and various institutions literary and benevolent, and therefore diligence in discharging the duties of some calling is absolutely requisite. The Apostle therefore commands "that we labour with our hands, that we may have to give to him that needeth," and he expressly asserts that "he who does not work," who is not industrious in some occupation, "ought not to eat." The sin and the danger do not lie in attending to the things of this world, but in pursuing them with immoderate solicitude, and to the neglect of our spiritual interests. Neither the offence to God nor the danger to our own souls consists in being *diligent in business*, but in indulging an excessive eagerness for the acquisition of the wealth of this world. A deceitful heart will often represent that as necessary which sound reason and the divine word must pronounce superfluous. In the pursuit of some secular object it will find excuses for neglecting the duties of the closet, and of the family, and of the temple, which cannot be sustained at the bar of conscience now, nor at the bar of an Infinite, impartial Judge hereafter. How often, therefore, are we admonished "not to love the world, nor the things which are in the world;" "to set our affections, not on things on the earth, but on those things which are above, where Jesus Christ sitteth on the right hand of God?" Where would be the necessity of admonitions thus pointed and repeated were we not naturally prone to excess in following after the things of time, and was not their excess dishonouring to God and

dangerous to our own eternal interests ? Who that has attended to the operations of his own mind, has not found from experience a natural and almost irresistible propensity to depart from the living God and place his affections on earth and its objects? How often do worldly cares intrude and disturb the soul when we attempt to engage in the duties of prayer, of searching the scriptures, of meditating on the perfections of Jehovah, or covenanting with him as our portion and joy ? How often do the *cares of the world* tempt us to hurry over the devotions of the family, and the instruction of our children, or prevent us from discharging with a becoming earnestness and affection those important services ? How often have *these cares of the world* hindered us from waiting upon the institutions of the sanctuary, and when we do attend, do they not often prevent us from listening with a suitable solemnity to the things which are spoken, and thus the sanctifying and saving influence of divine truth is lost ? The word of salvation is not suitably heard, nor treasured up, nor reflected upon, nor reduced to future practice. With what mingled tenderness and severity did our Lord reprove in Martha this inordinate anxiety, although she was at that moment occupied in making preparations for the entertainment of himself and his disciples ? " Mary," the sacred historian mentions, " sat at Jesus' feet and heard his words, but Martha was cumbered about much serving ; and Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many

things ; but one thing is needful ; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Let conscience bear witness, have we not been often prevented from attending some exercise of religion either private or public ; an exercise by our attention to which, our own spiritual comfort might have been promoted, and the zeal of others excited, by some secular engagement which was not indispensably necessary ? And my christian friends, when we come to render in our final account, if the end of our creation has been answered, the glory of God advanced, our generation served, and our salvation secured, neither the peace of our souls will be materially disturbed, nor our eternal reward lessened, although some things about our dress, or the furniture of our houses, or the cultivation of our farms may have been partially neglected. That the former should be done is of infinite and eternal importance ; by leaving the latter, in part, undone, we suffer no more than a temporary inconvenience or loss. " Seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and all other things shall be added unto you."

With the care of this world the deceitfulness of riches is here represented as uniting to prevent the efficacy of the *word* preached. Wealth in itself may be considered a great blessing and is highly desirable, as it conduces to our personal comfort and enlarges our sphere of usefulness. As the gift of divine bounty and an expression of the divine love, *riches* ought to excite our gratitude and in-

spire us with adoring thoughts of the goodness and condescension of that Being from whose munificence *cometh down every perfect gift.* But owing partly to our weakness, and partly to the corruption of our hearts *those riches* frequently become ensnaring to the soul ; they prove both *deceitful* in their nature and dangerous in their consequences. It may therefore be considered an enquiry both seasonable and important, how do *riches* become *deceitful* as the parable represents ? They prove a snare to the soul, as the possessor is often tempted to rest upon them, and rejoice in them as his portion, without seeking after that favor of Jehovah which alone constitutes the happiness of a rational and immortal mind. He is ready to imagine, in the vanity of his mind, that his fortune is made ; that he is fortified in all respects against the probability, or possibility of future want ; that " his mountain stands strong," and he may freely indulge himself in every gratification which his heart can desire. Riches in this respect are doubly *deceitful* ; they are not only considered a competent portion to the neglect of God and his fellowship, but an impression that he has ample provisions for every future want leads the possessor from that constant, entire dependence on divine providence which he might otherwise be constrained to exercise. It is, therefore, highly probable, that even among christians there is ordinarily more glory ascribed to God by the indigent than by those who are placed in circumstances of greater affluence. The former receive their

"daily bread" more immediately from the hand of their divine benefactor. It comes to them as an answer to their prayers, as a fruit of their trust on his providence, and each new supply fills them with new and more elevated conceptions of the Divine bounty and faithfulness ; but the rich receiving their supply from this and the other debtor too frequently overlook the hand of their Heavenly Father. His agency in ministering to their daily wants is unseen through the intervention of secondary causes. How affectingly was this *deceitful* influence of wealth exemplified in the history of the *rich man* described in the parable of our Lord. He is represented as saying to his soul, "thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

There is another respect in which riches may be considered no less *deceitful* and dangerous. They frequently tend to swell the possessors with pride and vain glory ; to render them contemptuous towards man and fearless of God. This, without a large measure of sanctifying grace, is the natural and almost necessary tendency of increasing wealth. A notion of their independence of their fellow creatures frequently grows up in the bosoms of the rich into a conceit of their independence of the Creator himself. There are instances without number of men who in the common walks of life appeared humble, respectful, and devout ; diligent in discharging the various duties of religion, private and public, and afterwards, upon the sudden ac-

quisition of wealth, became proud, insolent and oppressive; neither "fearing God nor regarding man." Their temper and conduct change with their change of external condition. There have also been instances, without number, of persons, who, in affluence, were vain, "high minded" and arbitrary, becoming upon a reverse of fortune, mild, peaceful, and amiable; "courteous" in their deportment towards man, and regular and apparently conscientious in the performance of every act of piety to God. These opposite facts shew in a light equally strong, the *deceitful* nature of *riches*; that they tend to fill the possessor with pride, self conceit, and self confidence. The Apostle thus commands Timothy to charge "them, who are rich in this world, not to be high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches," plainly intimating the dangerous influence of prosperity, and the necessity of *guarding* with vigilance against its *deceitful* nature: and Agur fervently ex postulates, "give me not riches, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?"

There is another consideration why the wealth of this world may be pronounced *deceitful*, and frequently proves hostile to our spiritual interests. By multiplying our cares it necessarily renders an attendance upon the ordinances of grace more difficult, and the efficacy of those ordinances less probable when we do attend. While the poor are occasionally filled with anxiety about obtaining what they really need, the rich usually feel a much greater solicitude about the means of

securing what they already possess, and a solicitude much more perplexing and distracting in its nature. One goes to his farm, and another to his merchandize, and either neglect the means of salvation, or "receive not the truth in the love of it, that they may be saved." These are the "thorns which choke the word and render it unfruitful." The Holy Ghost has thus admonished us, that "they who will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish, and hurtful lusts, which drowns men in destruction and perdition ;" and our Saviour has solemnly forewarned us, "that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven ; that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

We are taught from this passage the folly, the extreme folly, and presumption of indulging an immoderate solicitude about the wealth of this world. What ! shall we eagerly covet those *riches*, which the Saviour, in love to our souls, has pronounced *deceitful* ; which, he has declared, render it *hard* for us to "enter the kingdom of heaven ;" in the possession of which, he has asserted that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a man to enter the kingdom of God." Should not this consideration moderate both our pursuits and desires after the enjoyments of time, and should it not, also, arouse to an apprehension of their danger, and to a holy jealousy over their own spirits, those who are already placed in circumstan-

ees of affluence or honour. "Not many mighty; not many noble are called." In proportion as we become involved in the pleasures or business of life, our cares necessarily increase, the mind is distracted or diverted from spiritual things, our obligation to the living God is forgotten, the realities of death and a future state are excluded from our thoughts, and the interests of the soul for eternity are endangered, in pursuing what? Objects which are perishable in their nature, and will not materially conduce to our comfort in time. "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare;" they postpone the work of salvation until their favourite schemes are accomplished, and never open their eyes on their danger until the touch of death dissolves the spell, and they awake in the horrors of despair.

Even the children of the kingdom frequently suffer unspeakable loss by permitting themselves to become entangled in the affairs of this world. They spend in anxious contrivances about their temporal gain or aggrandizement hours which might be profitably occupied in the devotions of the closet or family, exercises by which their spiritual peace, their joy in God, and preparation for glory might be promoted. Through the influence of a carnal spirit they gradually "lose their first love," and ultimately "pierce themselves through with many sorrows." A review of the past; a recollection of their neglect of duty, and their conformity to the maxims of the world, frequently fills them with the most poignant

remorse and humiliation in the evening of life ; this often settles upon the soul as an impenetrable cloud, obscuring its evidences of reconciliation with God, and its prospects of future glory in his presence. Thousands owing to the indulgence of this worldly spirit are at last *scarcely saved*, who might otherwise have enjoyed an *abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom*. These reflections on this part of the parable I cannot conclude in language more instructive or affectionate, than in the following expostulations of three apostles of our Lord. “But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers, and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world : if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

But the spiritual sower shall not “spend his strength altogether for nought and in vain.” If one piece of ground is hard and impenetrable, refusing an entrance to the spiritual seed : If another part is *stony and shallow*, not affording a sufficiency of moisture to nourish the blade which has sprung up : If another is grown over with *thorns* which choke the grain, and prevent it from

ripening to perfection, there is a kindly soil into which some seeds shall happily fall, and take root, and spring up, and at last present an abundant harvest to reward the toil, and realize the expectations of the husbandman. Although in every congregation there are some of whom the pastor must "stand in doubt," and others who appear *hardened* under the influence of sin, and others who "make a fair show for a season," but afterwards turn aside from "the holy commandment," and disappoint his hopes, there are always some whom he may hail as "the travail of his soul," as the seals of his ministry, and anticipate as "his glory and joy," when the account of his stewardship is rendered. Perhaps there is no faithful servant of the Lord Jesus, who is not crowned with some success in his labors; who has not some hearers who are savingly called through his instrumentality as his consolation in time, and his glory forever. *They hear the word, and understand it. They hear; they wait with attention upon the means of grace and salvation.* The best soil cannot produce a crop without first receiving the seed, and without the hearing ear the understanding heart is not to be expected. Wherever the natural husbandman has a rational expectation of gathering a harvest, there he deposits the seed in its season, and wherever the Lord God appoints an individual to salvation, he ordinarily brings that individual to the means of salvation. To the most superficial observer it must be obvious, that those who are brought to a saving knowledge

of the truth are usually brought to it by a regular, respectful, persevering attention to the ordinances of the gospel. "Of his own will," says the Apostle, "begat he us by the word of truth." Rarely has the conversion of a sinner been effected by a clap of thunder; by a dream or vision of the night; by the sudden death of an acquaintance or connexion. Impressions produced by incidents of this nature, are generally like the flash of lightning which gleams for a moment, and then vanishes away. It was while Philip "preached Jesus" that the Ethiopian Eunuch became "wise unto salvation;" it was while Lydia attended the ministry of Paul, "where prayer was wont to be made," that the "Lord opened her heart," and called her to the fellowship of his love.

They hear the word, *and understand it*: they attend to it with earnestness and affection; "they receive it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God which effectually worketh also in them that believe." Although a divine, supernatural influence is indispensably necessary to render the gospel effectual for salvation, yet much is encumbent on ourselves; we ought to hear it with profound attention and solemnity; we ought frequently and affectionately to meditate upon it, and in hearing, or reading, or reflecting we ought devoutly to depend on the Holy Ghost for his influences to seal it upon our hearts; then we shall understand it, and *bear fruit*. As the natural seed, after taking root in the earth, springs up in due season, and be-

comes visible to the eye; as it will be seen, "first in the blade, then in the ear, after that in the full corn in the ear," so that grace which is saving in its nature is a living, productive principle; it first changes the heart, transforming it into the likeness of Christ Jesus Jehovah, and afterwards purifies the life and conversation. These fruits, which the Christian brings forth through the spirit of holiness enlightening, and sanctifying, and assisting are various, and may be considered, in general as comprehending all the duties which we owe in the different relations of life, whether social, or civil, or religious; the exercise of every talent entrusted to us by the great husbandman. "These fruits of the spirit," the Apostle mentions, "are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance." They consist, he notices in another epistle, they consist "in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth." Constrained by "the love of God which is shed abroad through his heart by the Holy Ghost," the believer will aim at obeying each divine commandment; at walking in each divine ordinance; at improving his time and occupying his talents to the glory of that Jesus who created, and redeemed, and sanctifies, and has promised ultimately to save him "with an everlasting salvation." "Ye are a chosen generation; a royal priesthood; an holy nation; a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

But every tree in the same orchard is not equally flourishing and fruitful; although they all grow in the same soil; are surrounded with the same atmosphere; participate the same influences of the sun and rain; are cultivated with equal care by the husbandman, and enjoy in all respects the same advantages, they are not all equally profitable to the proprietor; thus in the paradise of God, all the "trees of righteousness" are not equally fruitful to his glory. Some are thus represented in the parable as *bringing forth an hundred fold; some sixty; some thirty.* Daily observation upon the church of the living God furnishes a comment luminous and satisfactory on this verse. All the professors of religion, whom charity must consider real christians, are not equally edifying and useful. They are not all equally tender in their consciences, meek and selfdenied in their deportment, circumspect in their conversation before the world, uniform in their attendance upon the public institutions of religion, ardent in their zeal for the honour of God, or willing to spend their time and worldly substance in the promotion of every good work. Among the sincere followers of the Lamb, some are more contracted in their plans, more selfish in their motives, "seeking their own things," with little concern about the glory of Jesus, or the advancement of his cause in the earth, while others are more expanded in their views, more disinterested in their conduct, and endeavoring to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord." This variety of character has ap-

peared among the members of the christian church since its first erection in the world. In every period of time we have seen some "stars differing from" and excelling others around them in glory ; some christians rising superior to their cotemporary christians in the splendor of their gifts, and in the abundance of their services for the honor of their Master. It is thus testified of the Patriarch Job, that "there was none like him in the earth ; a perfect and an upright man ; one that feared God and eschewed evil ; who put on righteousness, and it clothed him ; to whom judgment was as a robe and a diadem." Jabez was pronounced "more honourable than his brethren," and believers in Berea were accounted "more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily." Even among the Apostles of the Lamb there are some whose names were scarcely mentioned except when they were first called by divine grace, and initiated into office. We hear little of their writings, or travels, or preaching, while others were "in labors more abundant ; in stripes, in imprisonment, in watchings, in fastings, preaching the word in season and out of season ; warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom ; they submitted to every bereavement, and braved all opposition that *they might finish their course with joy, and testify the gospel of the grace of God."

Brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, permit me to conclude our reflections

on this parable by affectionately reminding you of that divine admonition, "herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit :" let each individual aspire after the highest attainments in holiness of heart, and the highest grade of usefulness in their generation. Whatever be your talent, aim at occupying it with unremitting diligence, and a holy disinterestedness : whatever be your station in life, endeavor with humility and zeal to discharge the duties of that station. " Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price ; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are Gods." Instead of contriving apologies upon any occasion for the omission or postponement of duty, let redeeming love be always considered as imposing upon you an infinite obligation to the most prompt and cheerful discharge of it. Let your prayers ; your spiritual meditations ; your self dedications ; your alms of charity ; your contributions for purposes of piety be " coming up," from day to day, " for a memorial before God," thereby his glory will be advanced, the interests of his church will be subserved, the end of your creation and redemption will be answered, the splendor of your future crown and the plenitude of your eternal joy will be promoted. " The Lord God will render to every man according to his deeds. He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully."

LECTURE II.



THE PARABLE OF THE TARES.

MATTHEW XIII. 36.—43.

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

He answered and said unto them, he that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man;

The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

As therefore the tares are gathered, and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world.

The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.

And shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear let him hear.

AMONG the various parables delivered by our divine Redeemer, that which we have now read appeared to his disciples the most interesting. The conciseness of the style in which it was expressed, and yet its comprehensive import extending back to the com-

mencement, and forward to the consummation of time ; the grandeur of the imagery employed ; the *sower*, the *seed*, the *reapers*, the *world*, all these things conspired in a more than ordinary degree to arrest their attention, and excite a desire to understand more fully its meaning. No sooner, therefore, had our Lord dismissed the multitude, and retired into a private house, than the disciples followed him with a request that he would declare *the parable of the tares of the field*. Such is the familiarity which a people ought ever to manifest towards their pastor. When any thing in his discourse appears dark and mysterious, they ought to embrace a proper opportunity for asking an illustration ; in circumstances of perplexity and doubt, they ought freely to make known their anxieties and request an interest in his prayers and counsels. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." It may also be noticed that in the oracles of the living God, are some things *hard to be understood* ; some truths the investigation of which may occupy our diligence through life, and which will probably be unfolding for the contemplation of the redeemed through eternity. Many doctrines uttered by our Lord were mysterious even to the disciples who enjoyed the advantages of his personal ministry, and prophets in their day "inquired and searched diligently what the spirit of Christ which was in them did sig-

nify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

The next verse shows to us the promptitude, and cheerfulness with which this divine teacher hearkened to the request of his disciples, and gratified their desire by expounding the parable. *Jesus answered and said unto them*: it was his "meat and his drink to do the will" of his heavenly Father, and to promote the best interests of mankind. It was his delight to cherish in his followers the first appearances of piety, and attention to the great concerns of their salvation; to teach the ignorant, to strengthen the weak, to establish the wavering, to reclaim any who had departed from the paths of righteousness, and with the consolations of his gospel to "comfort all who mourned." Instead of "breaking the bruised reed," it was his care to confirm it, and "the smoking flax" he fanned into a flame. Such, also, will be the delight of every minister of the sanctuary who has imbibed the spirit of the compassionate Jesus. It is to him the occasion of exquisite joy when any of his hearers are inquiring into the meaning of some important part of divine truth, or how they may know whether the "word preached" has become effectual to their spiritual profit. Such questions occasionally proposed by their people, are more gratifying to a faithful pastor than all outward respect which they are capable of showing him, because it is a proof that "the pleasure of the Lord is prospering in his hands."

We now proceed to a consideration of the import of the parable, as explained by that infallible interpreter. *He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.* Our Saviour is often denominated the *Son of God* to express the essential dignity and glory of his nature, and also to convince us of his infinite capacity for accomplishing the work to which he was appointed as Mediator; that his sufferings being the sufferings of a God are divinely sufficient to expiate the most aggravated crimes of his people, and his obedience being the obedience of a God is divinely meritorious to secure our title to everlasting life. In the present instance, and in many others, he is called the *Son of man*, to instruct us, that in him, as Emmanuel, humanity was united to divinity; that as really man he was capable of obeying, and suffering, and satisfying in the very nature which had sinned: that as man he knows experimentally our frailties, and is thus capable of entering into all the feelings of his children, and of sympathizing with them in their diversified afflictions and sorrows.—There is perhaps no infirmity of body, no temptation, or conflict in soul which the children of the kingdom are called to endure, but Jesus, *the Son of man*, underwent it before them. “He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.”—The *Son of man* is the personage represented in the parable as *sowing the good seed*, and this office he executes as the prophet of his church. All the distinct, satisfactory know-

ledge which we possess of the divine Persons ; of the divine Perfections ; of the apostacy of Adam ; of the ruin which that apostacy induced upon himself, and the human kind ; of the method of our pardon and acceptance, and of the future, eternal destinies of man, are derived wholly from Jesus Jehovah in the capacity of a prophet. This *Sun of righteousness* is as much the source of all spiritual light, as the natural sun his brightest emblem in the material world is the source of natural light. "No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." He is thus emphatically denominated a "witness to the people ; the messenger of the covenant, and a teacher sent from God," to show that every saving communication of the divine will is through the mediation of the Son. He *sowed the good seed* partly in his own personal ministry during his residence in our world. He commenced his course of spiritual instruction when he had scarcely attained to the age of twelve years ; he continued it in his occasional converse with individuals, with private families, and in the public congregation until he finished it upon his exaltation to heaven.

One of his intimate companions bears this honourable testimony to his fidelity, "that he went about all the cities, and villages, teaching in their Synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom," and the multitude which flocked to his ministry were constrained to confess "that never man spake like this

man." When he was yet in his period of youth, we find him in a circle of Jewish doctors explaining the true nature of the law, and extricating it from those false glosses which their superstition, and blindness, and depravity had attached to it. We hear him, therefore, appealing to his righteous Father through David his type, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: Lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest, I have declared thy faithfulness, and thy salvation, I have not concealed thy loving kindness, and thy truth from the great congregation." But the act of sowing this *good seed*, was not limited to the ministry of "the Son of man" during his abode in our world. This prophetic office he had been executing in all preceding generations, and this he will continue to execute in the church until the end of time.—Since the period that the first promise was promulgated in Paradise until the present period, a succession of patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and ordinary pastors has been preserved for the instruction and admonition of mankind. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, in their respective ages, were all "preachers of righteousness." Amos, Isaiah, Joel, Jeremiah and Malachi also, in their respective ages, were all "preachers of righteousness." These were raised up during the lapse of nearly four thousand years for the instruction of mankind in their duty, and to forewarn them of judgments, both temporal and spiritual, which might be expected as the wages of transgres-

sion. These heralds of divine truth were like so many beams of light successively emitted from Jesus Jehovah the "Sun of righteousness." It was the "spirit of Christ which in them testified beforehand his own sufferings and the glory that should follow. God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." and by the ministry of men divinely called and competently qualified for the work, he will continue to execute his prophetic office until the last vessel of *election* is sanctified, and the dispensation of mercy is closed in this lower world.

It may be inferred from this verse, that all spiritual wisdom is derived exclusively from our Lord Jesus Christ as the prophet of his church. Each satisfactory, saving discovery which man has attained relative to the existence of the true God, or the manner of his existence, or the perfections of his nature, or his interposition for the recovery of our guilty world, or the scheme by which this recovery is effected, or the certainty of "a judgment to come," or the awards which await both the just and the unjust, all satisfactory knowledge relative to these interesting realities is derived either immediately or mediately from the eternal Son as the mediator and "messenger of the covenant." In whatever period of time, or under whatever dispensation of grace these mysteries were disclosed, or

whether they were announced by patriarchs, or prophets, or apostles, each communication came from the Son of God as its source. While as a priest he "abolished death" by his own vicarious, and infinitely meritorious death, he hath, as a prophet, "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." He teaches outwardly by his word, and by his spirit accompanying the word he shines upon the understanding of the sinner imparting the light of eternal life. "It is written in the prophets they shall be all taught of God. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

In conformity to the request of his apostles our Lord proceeds in his illustration of the parable, and informs them that *the field*, mentioned in it, is *the world*, or the nations which inhabit the world. On this great theatre as the *field*, the incorruptible seed has been scattered in a less or greater degree from the beginning of time. Among the nations of the earth, if I may change the similitude, the true light has been diffused sometimes more extensively and luminously, and sometimes it has shone with a degree of lustre more obscure, and over a region of country more contracted. The knowledge of salvation was long confined to

a particular part of the earth, and to a particular family of mankind, but before the ascension of our Lord the “wall of partition was broken down,” and the command was issued forth “to teach all nations baptising them; to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” It is now the divine pleasure and purpose that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea: that this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations.” There is a period approaching, when the world will be literally and emphatically the field; when the scriptures shall be translated into all languages; when they shall be circulated through all countries; when they shall be read by men of every colour, and every kindred under heaven, and the name of Jesus the mediator shall be great “from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same.”

The good seed, this divine expositor informs us, is designed to represent *the children of the kingdom*. The righteous are often denominated *children*, to express both their adoption and their sanctification. As *children* they are translated from the family of nature into the family of grace; they become related to Jehovah as their friend and Father, and are recognized by him under the endearing relation of *sons and daughters*: and with the names of children are connected important and eternal immunities. “If children,” by adopting grace, “then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Yea, all things

are theirs, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are theirs, and they are Christs, and Christ is Gods." But this name of children expresses also their sanctification or conformity to the image of their heavenly Father ; they resemble him in their holiness, their humility, their forbearance, and become "followers or imitators of him" in all his imitable excellencies. By the *kingdom* here mentioned we may understand the church invisible, the whole multitude of the redeemed in every part of the world, and in every period of time. They are the "children of the kingdom ;" they have by their regeneration and adoption an interest in all its privileges and prospects ; they are united to the person of the eternal Son, adorned with the perfect robe of his righteousness, and thus fellow heirs with him and with each other, to the boundless blessings of his purchase ; to all the immunities both of grace and glory. But more is imported in the denomination "children of the kingdom" than merely an interest in its privileges : They consult the honour and interest of this *kingdom* ; they feel a cordial concern for its prosperity, that its boundaries may be enlarged, that the number of its true members may be increased, that all who are its *children* by profession may "walk worthy of him who is calling them to glory and virtue," and they are ever ready with their secular substance to promote its extension in the earth. They who feel no solicitude for the prosperity of the church,

and are not willing, as ability or opportunity offers, to advance its interests, are not *children of the kingdom*. However splendid their profession, or however frequent and noisy their exclamation, "the temple of the Lord; the temple of the Lord," they are not the living members of the Son of God. All who appertain to the spiritual family, while they are affectionately expostulating, "thy kingdom come," will deem it their duty and glory to contribute of their earthly property for its furtherance in the earth.

But the tares are the children of the wicked one. The word which we translate *tares* occurs several times in this chapter, but so far as I recollect is used in no other instance in the new testament. The *tares* are represented by naturalists as a "plant with a long, rough leaf, not easily distinguished from the genuine grain among which it grows." It was very common in Palestine, and particularly pernicious to their crops of corn. These *tares* represent the *children of the wicked one*. Although formal professors associate with the real disciples of our Lord; are recognized as members of his family; are called by his name, and admitted to all the external privileges of his house, still their real character remains the same; they are not reconciled to God by the blood of his Son; they are not "renewed in the spirit of their mind;" they do not bear the likeness of their Father in heaven; they are not actuated by a principle of respect to his authority, nor a fervent zeal for the prosperity of his cause. Various mo-

tives prompt carnal men to ask the privileges of the church. It is sometimes done merely to pacify an awakened, anxious conscience, as few can be satisfied without some form of religion, or it is done in accommodation to the fashion of the place or age in which they live, or for the advancement of their temporal interest and honour. There probably never was a church upon earth without a proportion of empty, formal professors, of carnal men induced by carnal considerations to ask admission to the distinguishing privileges of the spiritual family.

We learn from this passage that no outward advantages or profession alter the real character of man. These *tares* were growing in the same field with the wheat, nourished with the same soil, and fenced around with equal care and expense, yet they were *tares*: still, a representation of the "children of the wicked one." We may have been descended from righteous parents; we may have been early baptized; we may have been instructed in the principles of the christian religion; we may be admitted to all the outward ordinances of the visible church, and pass in the estimation of others as regular professors, while we are not acknowledged by a heart-searching God as "children of the kingdom," nor possess any claim to their future prospects. Simon Magus, although baptized, baptized even by an apostle, was afterwards declared by the Holy Ghost to be "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." The foolish virgins associated with the wise; with

them they arose at the voice of the bridegroom ; like them they carried in their hand the lamp of a profession, and expected admission with them to "the marriage supper of the Lamb," yet how melancholy was their disappointment ? Their lamps went out in utter darkness, the door of hope was shut against them, and they were left to endless weeping, and lamentations, and woe. Who were more ostentatious in their profession than the Scribes, and the Pharisees ? They fasted often ; they paid tithes of all that they possessed ; they were neither "extortioners, nor unjust, nor adulterers," and yet the final and infallible Judge has asserted that "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes, and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Let all be admonished therefore that *neither circumcision availeth any thing,*" all the advantages of the Jewish church will not savingly profit ; *nor uncircumcision availeth any thing,* all the advantages of the christian church, *but faith which worketh by love.* No profession will bear the test, the fiery test of the judgment day ; but that which is founded on union to the everlasting Jesus, and reconciliation "through the blood of his cross." All who are "begotten again to a living hope by his resurrection from the dead" are recognised as *children of the kingdom,* and in the end shall be introduced to its exalted honours and joys ; and all others, what ever be their present pretensions or expectations, must experience disappointment and shame.

The enemy that soweth them is the devil. He is denominated an *enemy*, because of his irreconcilable hatred of God, and his unwearied and most malignant opposition to the progress of his kingdom in the earth. This apostate spirit would, if it was possible, subvert the throne of the omnipotent; and introduce disorder into every part of the moral government of God: he early discovered his enmity by seducing man to revolt from his Creator and rightful Sovereign, and he manifests the same enmity from age to age, by using every conceivable artifice to prevent his return to his duty. “The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God should shine into them.” In another parable he is represented as attempting to defeat the influence of divine truth by “catching away that which is sown in the heart,” by diverting the attention of men from reflecting upon, and improving the word which they hear. Here his enmity appears in *sowing tares among the wheat*, or in attempting to introduce false professors into the bosom of the church, and thus ultimately to bring reproach upon religion, and more aggravated ruin on the souls of those whom he deceives. It appears almost unaccountable that this fallen spirit, who is so malignantly and irreconcilably opposed to the prosperity of the church, should have any influence in bringing members to its outward communion. But he knows perfectly that men may assume the mask of religion,

and yet remain strangers to its power ; that they may have their names enrolled among the visible followers of Jesus, without a saving change of their nature, and thus like *tares* growing among the wheat, they tend both to annoy and injure others without any lasting advantage to themselves, or glory to God. After continuing for a season in their profession of religion, they become weary of the ordinances of Christ, impatient of that restraint which is imposed upon them by the discipline of his house, and at last renounce their profession to the dishonour of God, to the reproach of the christian name, to the offence of the righteous, and to their own greater condemnation and woe. Just as the winds of heaven blow the chaff from among the wheat, "so tribulation or persecution for righteousness' sake" separates these formal professors from the true church ; or when listed up by prosperity, by the increase of wealth, or their advancement in worldly honours they frequently abandon the ordinances of christianity, and walk no longer with the generation of the upright. Mournful instances of such apostacies have occurred in every period of the church. Such was Judas Iscariot who betrayed his master : such was Demas who accompanied Paul for a time, but afterwards forsook him, "having loved this present world :" such was Julian the Roman Emperor usually called the *apostate* who appeared soon after the days of the Apostles. These and thousands of others may be considered *tares* which the enemy sowed among the

wheat ; they assumed the form of Godliness but were not possessed of its sanctifying influence, and therefore returned back to the world "as the dog to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

The harvest is the end of the world. The period of harvest is a very beautiful, and impressive emblem of the consummation of all things. Then the fruits of the earth have reached the perfection of their nature ; the seed which had been formerly sown in the field, and which had been advancing from process to process attains its full growth, and may be cut down as ready for the purpose for which it was intended. The harvest is thus a suitable and very awful representation of the end of this world. Then the generations of men will all be filled up ; the last son and the last daughter which were to descend from Adam, and were requisite for completing the number of the family of mankind, will have appeared on the earth ; the graces of the righteous will then have been sufficiently tried, and proved, and perfected, and the reprobate "as vessels of wrath will be fully fitted to destruction." Then the royal mandate will issue forth from the throne of the Eternal, "put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe ;" the mighty "angel lifting up his hand to heaven will swear, by him that liveth forever and ever, that there shall be time no longer ;" the present order of things will then cease ; "all rule, and all authority, and power both in the church and in the world

will be put down," and the endless condition of man will be unalterably fixed.

How affecting is the thought that this world will have an end? The houses which we now occupy must decay and moulder into ruins; the laws which govern the material system will be dissolved; there will be no more the alternate returns of "seed time and harvest, of cold and heat, of summer and winter, of day and night;" the earth which we now inhabit and to which our affections are so ardently attached, "shall be burned up;" the sun will grow dim with age; nature shall sink in years;" these heavens which we now behold shall be "rolled together as a scroll," and afterwards there will appear "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God? Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

As *the harvest* is employed by our Lord to represent the *end of the world*, *the reapers are the angels*. The office of a reaper is to cut down the fruits of the earth when fully ripened, and collect them for the use of the proprietor. Holy angels receive the appellation of *reapers* because of that important part which they shall perform at the conclusion of the present order of things. By their instrumentality the throne will probably be erected

for judgment ; the bodies of the nations of mankind will be raised from their graves ; the bodies of those who are found alive will be changed ; the just and the unjust will be separated from each other ; the parties will be arranged on the right hand, and upon the left, for trial, and the Judge will be conducted from his throne in the *third heavens* to his *great white throne* in the air, for the important work of judging the nations ; for it is mentioned in the 41st verse, *the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.* It is worthy of notice that these celestial spirits are called *his* angels, angels of the Son of man. As God he gave them existence originally, “ for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers ; all things were created by him, and for him : ” as God he supports these angels in existence from moment to moment, for “ he upholdeth all things by the word of his power,” and to Jesus as mediator they are now subjected, that they may become subservient to his glory in the administration both of providence and grace. “ He maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire : Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation ? ”

These angels under the direction of the Son of man, *shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniqui-*

ty: the invisible church, or the society of the faithful is here considered as *the kingdom of Messiah*; he redeemed it with his blood; he sanctifies it by his Spirit; he enlightens it by his doctrine; he governs it by his laws; he edifies its members by the administration of his ordinances; he refreshes them with pledges of his presence, and intimations of his love, and from them he demands a tribute of glory as an expression of their gratitude to him for creating, and redeeming love; being “bought with a price,” even his own infinitely precious blood, every member of *this kingdom* is obligated to glorify the Son both “in body and in spirit.”

Out of this kingdom the Son of man will gather by the ministry of his angels *every thing that offendeth and them which do iniquity.* The tares which grow among the wheat are a figurative representation of false professors who are now mingled with real believers, and they are set forth in the parable as *offending.* Their cold, formal, lifeless services are offensive to that “God who is a Spirit,” and can be pleased only with that worship which is performed “in spirit and in truth.” *They do iniquity,* because by intruding into his church they insult his omniscience in offering him the appearance of religion without its reality; they thus by a false profession, presume to deceive him who cannot be deceived; who knoweth intuitively and perfectly “what is in man; who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, and dwelleth only with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit.”

As these tares, these *children of the wicked one offend* a holy God, they also offend and injure the generation of the upright with whom they associate. “ Evil communications corrupt good manners.” Just as a diseased member affects the health and vigour of the natural body of which it constitutes a part, or as the withered, decayed branch proves pernicious to the growth of the tree with which it is connected, so the mere formalist is both an *offence*, and an injury to the church of the living God. His worldly and wanton conversation has a carnalizing influence even upon those who are exercised to Godliness, and his irregular walk becomes to them a temptation and a snare. But these *tares* shall at last be separated from the wheat ; all *that offend and they which do iniquity, shall be gathered out of his kingdom* ; not a single sinner shall be left in all the congregation of the righteous ; angels as ministers of divine justice will make an utter and everlasting separation of the unjust from the society of the just.

The present is a promiscuous state in the christian church ; the genuine believer and the cold hearted formalist now convene in the same sanctuary ; they approach the same sacramental table ; they receive together the symbols of the body and blood of the same Redeemer. Notwithstanding all the vigilance of ministers or other ecclesiastical officers, many obtain admission to the seals of the covenant who are not actually interested in the covenant itself. “ Man looketh to the outward appearance,” but cannot explore the

heart, nor discover its secret motives, and intentions. When sincerity is professed by applicants for the privileges of the church, we ought, in the exercise of charity, to hope that it is unfeigned, and with a competent knowledge and exemplary conversation, they ought readily to be admitted to her communion. Thus Simon upon the profession of his faith was baptized by Philip the Evangelist, although he afterwards proved to be an impostor; and was rebuked and probably cut off as an unworthy member. Reproach is frequently thrown upon the officers of the church on account of the irregular walk of its members, but this censorious spirit arises from want of reflection on the nature of the present dispensation. Although caution ought to be exercised in inquiring into the character and motives of those who desire to join themselves to the Lord by a public profession of his religion, and although vigilance should be exercised in watching over the conduct of those who are already called by his name, yet this parable of our Saviour, and the history of his church in all ages instruct us that perfect purity is not to be expected. "It must needs be that offences come. The kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto ten virgins—and five of them were wise, and five were foolish," and although extremes ought carefully to be avoided, yet it is certainly most safe to err on the side of charity. It is probably better to admit to the distinguishing ordinances of religion two unworthy applicants, than to exclude from those privileges one that is wor-

thy. The church in the present world is in a militant state, and its trials are to be expected not only from enemies without, but from false professors within. It is the pleasure of the great Husbandman that *the tares and the wheat grow together until the harvest*, and after that an eternal separation will be made. *Then the children of the wicked one shall be cast into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.* The punishment of the reprobate in a future world is held forth in scripture by a variety of language. To express the loss which they shall sustain, they are said to be cast into *darkness, outer darkness, and the blackness of darkness for ever.* They will there be deprived of all conceivable good; of every enjoyment which they now desire, and which is essential to the happiness of man. They will no longer behold the light of the natural sun; they will no longer enjoy the pleasures of social life, nor have access to those sumptuous meats and drinks with which they often pamper their bodies to excess in this world. The covetous shall no longer enjoy his favourite gold, nor the ambitious man his honours, nor the children of pleasure their amusements, nor the voluptuous their sensual gratifications. From all these sources of delight the damned will be utterly and endlessly excluded. The bereavements of the reprobate are most affectingly set forth in the condition of the rich man who desired, but was denied, a drop of water to cool his tongue. But what is a consideration inconceivably more awful, they will be shut out from the comfortable;

presence of Jehovah, "whose favor is life." That sentence "depart from me, ye cursed," includes the very essence of the horrors of hell. To be banished from our country is dreadful; to be banished from our kindred is dreadful; to be instantaneously bereaved of the society of our friends and acquaintances would be dreadful, but to be banished from the communion of a gracious God, that Being who is the perfection of excellence, the fountain of bliss, would be infinitely more dreadful; and yet such will be the doom, the unavoidable doom of the finally impenitent. "They shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." They will be deprived forever of every intimation of his love, or any offers of reconciliation to his favor; they will hear of him no more but in the thunder of the curse; they will see him no more but in the lightnings of his wrath; they will feel him no more but in the torments which he inflicts. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment."

"O that men were wise; that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end." The eternal God yet waits to be gracious: he is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them: "Turn you at his reproof," and he promises, "I will pour out my spirit upon you; I will make known my words unto you. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Will you not be persuaded to comply with these overtures of peace, and "seek the Lord while he may be found?" Will you not rather bow to the sceptre of his mercy, than be crushed eternally by the arm of his power? Will you not rather be earnest in the confession of your sins, and asking the loving kindness of Jehovah, than sink for ever the victims of his displeasure? "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring flames? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

But, O, how different! widely different and unspeakably blessed and glorious will be the latter end of the just? *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the Sun in the kingdom of their Father.* The persons who shall inherit the kingdom are denominated *righteous*. This appellation belongs to none in their natural condition, "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." All are therefore "by nature the children of wrath," and there is no reconciliation with the Father by any performances of their own. But that righteousness, which was forfeited by the transgression of the "first Adam," and is unattainable by any works of the creature, by the obedience and blood of the "second Adam, the Lord from heaven" is fully recovered. "He hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and is now the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." They who are interested in his vicarious, infinitely perfect righteousness are regarded by the divine law as fully *righteous*; they obtain the free, the full, and everlasting

remission of their trespasses, and “being justified by divine grace, they are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” They who are thus *righteous shall shine forth.* They will be all-glorious ; their souls will not only be completely exempted from that guilt and deformity which are the consequences of transgression, but will be fully assimilated to the image of Jesus the “*first born,*” and will for ever be irradiated with one stream of light from him, the “*Sun of righteousness.*” Their bodies also will be all-glorious ; they will be redeemed from those frailties, and defects, and afflictions of every kind which were incurred by the demerit of sin, and adhered to them during their continuance on earth. The ransomed body which, in its dissolution from the soul, “is sown in corruption, shall then be raised in incorruption ; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory ; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power ; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.” If the face of Moses shone by a momentary converse with Jehovah upon the mount, so “that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold it for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away :” If Moses and Elias appeared in glory when they made an occasional visit to our earth which is now polluted by the disobedience of man, what, must we suppose, will be the glories of the redeemed amidst the full perfection of the heavenly world?

Their bodies, being occupied by a glorified spirit within, and irradiated by the unclouded effulgence of “the Lamb in the midst of the throne,” will be like so many orbs of light emitting and reflecting light and glory upon each other.

Christian, in the anticipation of celestial glory, how regardless mayest thou feel of all the reproaches which are heaped upon thy name, or all the defects which either enfeeble or deform thy body upon earth? “The trumpet shall hereafter sound, and thy body shall be raised incorruptible and fashioned like unto the glorious body of thy Saviour and Lord.” In the anticipation of celestial joy, with what resignation and cheerfulness mayest thou endure the various troubles and disappointments of thy lot in this world? Thy reproaches and sorrows are all momentary, thy pleasures and thy glories will be uninterrupted and eternal. “There shall be no more curse: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”

And, fellow christians, does not heaven appear more desirable in prospect, and must not its full fruition be rendered more delightful from the consideration that it is the *kingdom of our Father!* There he has erected his throne; there he resides as in his palace; there he is surrounded by myriads of angels *who do his pleasure;* this kingdom he “prepared for us from the foundation of the world;

this he has bequeathed to us as the objects of his eternally electing love, and the children of his free adopting grace, and to the possession of it he will introduce every *one in his own order*. Jesus our representative and forerunner has already entered it in our name, and for us he is devoutly interceding before the throne, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am ; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me ; for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world."

This parable is concluded with a solemn and impressive admonition for all to attend, *who hath ears to hear, let him hear* : let him be impressed with the importance of the doctrines which it contains ; let him realize his own immediate and everlasting concern in them. This congregation is a section of the *field* represented in the parable, and every individual now hearing me constitutes a portion either of "the good seed, the children of the kingdom, or the tares, the children of the wicked one." And, beloved friends, is it not infinitely interesting that you ascertain to which class you belong, and where you shall have your eternal abode ? Whether in *the end of this world you shall be cast into a furnace of fire, where shall be wailing, and gnashing of teeth*, or whether you are to *shine through everlasting ages as the Sun in the kingdom of your Father* ?

Thou Spirit of all grace, look in tender compassion upon this large assembly ; permit neither male nor female to deceive themselves.

with a name to live while they are spiritually dead. If there be any *tares* in this *field*, we ask thee not to root them out in thy wrath, but rather to transform them by that power omnipotent which is “able even to subdue all things unto thyself.” Forbid that any, who are thine by early devotion in baptism, and by actual admission to the ordinances of thy house, should perish in the end with Pagans, and the open scoffers of religion; but by adopting grace, and the regenerating influences of the Holy Ghost, may they be constituted the *children of the kingdom*, and at last through abounding mercy be brought to the eternal enjoyment of its pleasures and glories.—“Thou, Lord, knowest all things, thou knowest” that it is the unfeigned desire of thy servant that “all Israel may be saved;” thou knowest that he frequently and fervently prays for their conversion, and anxiously studies to find out arguments which, through thy power accompanying, may be effectual for promoting it. Make bare thine holy arm this day, and may all in this assembly “see the salvation of our God.” AMEN.

LECTURE III.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

MATTHEW XXV. 1.—13.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them.

But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight there was a cry made, behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

But the wise answered, saying, not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But he answered and said, verily I say unto you, I know you not.

Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour, wherein the Son of man cometh.

THESE verses, like many of the prophecies and parables delivered by our Lord, admit of a twofold application. They may

be considered as referring primarily and principally to the people of the Jews. The *slumber* and *sleep*, which the virgins were indulging, may be designed to express the deep and deplorable infatuation of that nation: they remained unalarmed and unreclaimed amidst the most pointed and repeated admonitions of our Lord and his apostles. By the *coming of the Bridegroom* mentioned in the sixth verse is probably implied the appearance of the Son of God for the destruction of their city, the subversion of their temple, and their utter overthrow and dispersion as a nation. This event occurred *at midnight*, that is, at a period altogether unexpected: they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded, they were absorbed in their secular pursuits, and carnal gratifications, until "sudden destruction came upon them, as travail upon a woman with child." The admonition, *watch therefore*, may have a general reference to churches which enjoy the means of salvation. It contains an explicit warning, not *to receive* the dispensation of *the grace of God in vain*, but *to give the more earnest heed to the things which they hear*; not to be partakers with the Jews in their unbelief and impenitence, lest they be ultimately involved "in the same plagues."

This parable, although it refers primarily to the Jews, ought not to be confined in its application to that nation; it refers to the visible church in all ages of time, and to us as a congregation "is profitable for doctrine, for

reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

Then shall the kingdom of heaven. In this and many other instances through the New-Testament, the *kingdom of heaven* represents the church under the dispensation of the gospel. Like the kingdoms of this world, the christian church has a system of laws for her regulation, even the word of God; her subjects, all who profess the religion of the holy Jesus, and she may claim as her King the Son of God in his mediatorial character.— “The government shall be upon his shoulders. The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his Father David: and he shall rule over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” The dispensation of divine mercy under the gospel, is emphatically called the *kingdom of heaven*, because its *glory far excelleth* the dispensation which preceded during the reign of the law. The light under the New-Testament economy is much clearer; the worship is more simple and spiritual; the blessings are communicated in more abundant measure, and the duration of the present dispensation is more permanent, and it shall continue unaltered until the end of the world. Thus John the Baptist, the harbinger of Messiah's appearing in the flesh, publicly announced, *repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;* a new and more glorious dispensation is shortly to be ushered in; the type is to give place to the Antitype; and the shadows of Moses must soon vanish before the radiance of “the Sun of

Righteousness," who is now rising upon the nations.

The kingdom of heaven is here likened unto ten virgins. The virgins, noticed in this verse, are the members of the visible church; they who are by profession the followers of the Lamb, and they are denominated *virgins* to denote that spiritual chastity, that spotless purity by which they ought ever to be characterized; that holiness of heart and of life, by which they should be distinguished from the rest of the world. "As he who hath called them is holy," so they are commanded to be "holy in all manner of conversation: to have no fellowship with the unsightly works of darkness, but rather to reprove them." The apostle thus reminds the believing Corinthians, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a *chaste virgin to Christ.*" And they who stood upon Mount Sion, while they had "their Father's name written upon their foreheads," to express their open avowal of his religion are also represented as undefiled "with women, for they are virgins." Indeed the sanctification of the church is an important, yea, a principal part of her salvation. It is the great design of the election of believers by the Father's love, of their redemption by the grace of the co-eternal Son, of all the ordinances of religion, and of all the operations of the Holy Ghost upon their hearts. *They are chosen to be holy, and without blame before him in love.* They are redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus to be a peculiar people, zealous of good works:

and by the spirit of holiness they are called *to walk in newness of life.* But with cordial grief, with deep humiliation, it may be remarked that the appellation of *virgins* rather indicates what the professed followers of Jesus ought to be, than what they generally are: It rather expresses those high degrees of mortification to the world, and advancement in holiness after which they should aspire, than to which they actually attain.

These virgins took their lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom. That the import of this passage may be more clearly understood, it is necessary to advert to the usual practice of the Jews in relation to their marriages. These were ordinarily solemnized in the evening, when the bride, accompanied with her party, went forth to meet the Bridegroom, each virgin carrying a lamp in her hand. As the *virgins*, mentioned in the parable, are designed to represent the members of the christian church, by the *Bridegroom* is to be understood the Son of God whom we must all meet in death, and at the general judgment. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations."

Five of these virgins were wise and five were foolish. The meaning of this verse is too obvious to require any particular illustration. The *wise* virgins are those professors of the Redeemer's name, who have been taught by the Holy Ghost, "to know the things which belong to their peace;" who have been ena-

bled by his Almighty and all-gracious agency "to make their calling, and election sure;" who were industrious to "redeem the time," and to improve every ordinance of grace for attaining to higher degrees of sanctification and spiritual knowledge; who were wise in noticing "the signs of the times;" in marking the operations of their Father's hand, both in prosperity and adversity; who were "not slothful in business," but aimed at occupying every talent in the fear of God, with a concern for his glory, and with reference to that solemn reckoning which awaited them when the account of their stewardship would be required. "This fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom;" it is not only the *beginning*, but the progress and the perfection of wisdom; it comprehends our duty and glory and interest.

The *foolish* virgins are the cold, slothful, formal professors of religion. They are such as rest satisfied "with a name to live;" who attend the outward dispensation of the gospel, but are not "born of the Spirit;" do not worship Jehovah in "the beauties of holiness," nor rejoice in him as their portion and glory. These *virgins*, resting on the mere "form of Godliness," are pronounced *foolish*, because all knowledge in the head, and the most splendid outward profession in the life, without grace in the heart, will be utterly unprofitable. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Though "I speak with the tongue of men, and of angels," says the apostle, "and have not charity, I am,

become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

This verse contains an obvious and awful admonition for every member of the visible church. It instructs us that not *every one that sailth unto Jesus, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.* Hundreds, and it may be thousands who now frequent his ordinances, who are called by his name, who stand high in their own estimation, and in the estimation of others, are no more than *foolish virgins*, and will be disappointed in the end. Although the circumstance that *five* were pronounced *wise*, and *five foolish* will not authorize us to conclude that the professors of religion consist equally of self-deceivers and the truly righteous, yet it gives us reason to apprehend that in every society there is a proportion of empty formalists, and should inspire us with a holy jealousy in the examination of our own character. In every *valley of vision*, there are some *dry bones*; some who attend the outward ordinance, but remain destitute of spiritual life: In every *vineyard*, there are some *barren figtrees*; some which occupy a space within the sacred enclosures of Zion, yet present no fragrant blossoms, nor ripening fruits to the glory of God: In every *field*

there is a proportion of *tares* growing among the genuine wheat, to annoy and injure it. Notwithstanding all the fidelity of ministers in showing the danger of self-deception, and their vigilance in endeavouring to separate the *precious from the vile*, unworthy members will probably be always finding admission into the congregation of the Lord.

They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them ; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Oil in scripture is frequently employed as a symbol of those sanctifying and saving influences which the Holy Ghost communicates to the soul in regeneration. “ But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.” By the effusion of oil, persons, and places, and things were consecrated under the former dispensation, and thus separated for the service of Jehovah. By the pouring forth of the sacred oil, Aaron was consecrated to be a high priest, and initiated into his office. By the same ceremony David was separated to the regal, and Samuel to the prophetic office, and by the influences of the Holy Ghost, of which this oil was an appointed symbol, all *the election of grace* are in their proper order consecrated as “ kings and priests to God even the Father ;” they are qualified both for his service and his communion. In allusion to this ancient observance, the *wise virgins* are represented as taking *oil in their vessels with their lamps* ; they had received the sanctifying unction by the residence of the Divine Spirit with-

in them, enlightening, and purifying, and directing them ; they were not merely instructed externally in the *letter* of the law, but "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness" had shined in their hearts to give them "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ;" they had not rested satisfied with putting on the outward mask of a profession, but were careful to be inwardly adorned "with the garments of salvation," even that perfect righteousness which the Saviour imparts. "They were begotten again to a living hope," and evinced the reality of this inward unction by walking uniformly and circumspectly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. But the foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them ; they were baptized ; they were instructed in the oracles of divine truth ; they had a "name among the living in Jerusalem," but aspired after no higher attainments ; they did not "rejoice supremely in Christ Jesus," nor rest exclusively upon his sacrifice and righteousness for pardon, and peace, and eternal glory.

While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered, and slept. This expresses a degree of apostacy in the church, both mournful and universal. The foolish virgins, the mere formalists, had become unusually vain in their imaginations. In the wantonness and impiety of their hearts, they were asking, "where is the sign of his coming ? They did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted," with the fond, but delusive expectation, to-

morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant. Absorbed in the amusements and pursuits of the present world, they found little leisure, and felt less inclination to look forward to the solemnities of death and judgment, events which were rapidly approaching. *Even the wise virgins,* the children of light, had deplorably declined from their *first love*; they had lost that delight in the duties of religion, either private or public, that fervour of spiritual affection, that tenderness of conscience, those earnest longings after the fellowship of their Father, and that ardent concern for the prosperity of his kingdom to which they had once attained, and which constitute the glory and happiness of the christian life.

That langour and indifference, into which even the righteous frequently fall, may be traced to various causes. It arises, sometimes, from their *entire omission*, or their *formal discharge* of duty. While the neglect of the ordinances of grace is the evidence of a declining state, it has also a direct tendency to increase that declension. A body, already feeble, becomes still more enfeebled if the means of nourishment and health are withheld. We are therefore exhorted "as newborn babes, to desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby," obviously intimating, that if the word is neglected, if the scriptures are not devoutly read, and if the preaching of the gospel is not diligently improved, the growth of the spiritual babe is not to be expected. This lethargy in the divine life often arises from an immoderate at-

tachment to, and pursuit of the things of the world. When the christian permits his affections unduly to centre on the objects of sense, on the gain or honours of the present life, the spirit of holiness is grieved, and ceases to operate as "the spirit of grace and supplication :" Then the believer's joy in God is succeeded by joy in the world ; all the graces of the spiritual life imperceptibly languish, and even the *wise virgins slumber, and sleep.* "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him : I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." This decay of spiritual health frequently arises, also, from familiar intercourse with the men, and conformity to the maxims of the world. Perhaps there is no other cause by which the children of the kingdom in all ages have suffered greater loss to their souls. By frequently associating with worldly men, and mingling in their vain conversation, their hearts become carnal and earthly : They become alienated in their affections from the living God, and lose their relish for the ordinances of religion. How explicit, therefore, is that warning delivered by our Lord to his disciples!—"Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God ? whosoever therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Again, " Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

We are admonished by this passage, that the real followers of Jesus often "lose their first love," and are guilty of grievous apostacies from their heavenly Father. They occasionally become so earthly in their affections, so carnal in their conversation, so un-tender in their walk, so irregular in their attendance upon the duties of religion, both private and public, as scarcely to be distinguishable from the men of this world. Such was the condition of Lot in Sodom ; of Noah after his miraculous deliverance from the deluge ; of David "the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and the man after God's own heart," and of Solomon "after the Lord had appeared unto him twice." The heart of the latter "was turned from the Lord God of Israel," and his shameful offences were written in his future punishment.—"The Lord was angry with Solomon, and the Lord said unto Solomon, for as much as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant, and my statutes, which I commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it unto thy servant." A covenant God, in the overflowings of his mercy, forgives the iniquity of his people ; but he "taketh vengeance of their inventions." He may permit others to *slumber and sleep* ; to "fulfil the desires of the flesh, and of the mind," without rebuke and without chastisement, because a retribution awaits them in the future state ; but the correcting rod must be expected by the children of the spiritual family, who "become vain in their imaginations," and indulge

an “evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.” “If they break my statutes,” he declares, “and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes.” Some awful visitation is employed for rousing them from their slumbers, and reclaiming them to repentance and obedience. For the repeated transgressions of Solomon, his kingdom was rent in sunder; and for the untender, licentious courses of David, the following fearful sentence was denounced to him by the prophet in the name of the Lord: “Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house, because thou hast despised me. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.”

But neither the shameful security of the wise virgins, nor the wantonness and impenitence of the foolish, prevented, or even retarded the approach of their Lord; for *At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.* Whatever sloth or unconcern is indulged, either by sinners or saints, “their judgment lingereth not.” With each rolling year, and month, and week, and day, they are borne along towards the tribunal of an omniscient, impartial God. It is noticed that the alarm was given *at midnight*, at a moment the most unexpected, when all suspicion slumbered, and they were secretly saying *peace and safety*. With what fearful apprehensions are even the *righteous* frequently seized, when

the summons of their departure is offered them! They become formal and irregular in the discharge of duty; they are entangled with the cares, or intoxicated with the pleasures of the world, and then death, the prospect of which might have transported them with joy, is the messenger of wo. The recollection of time not redeemed, of talents not duly occupied, of conformity to the practices of a degenerate age in which they lived, fills them with perplexity and terror. But if the righteous, owing to their carelessness, and worldly mindedness, are agitated and alarmed at the approach of death, what confusion and horror must rend the soul of the ungodly when the appearance of their Lord is suddenly and unexpectedly announced! And it often occurs that when the sinner *sleeps* on securely amidst the admonitions of the word and providence of God, *his soul is required* at a time, and in a manner of which he had the least apprehension. "Behold," the insulted and indignant Saviour proclaims, "behold, I come as a thief. He, that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed." When the gay are lost in the whirlpool of pleasure, perhaps in the midst of the enchanting dance, and the covetous are devising new schemes for the accumulation of wealth, and the ambitious are projecting other plans of self-aggrandizement, the message is thundered awful in their ears, AWAKE, ARISE, and COME TO JUDGMENT! "Sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child." Impenitent men

are never in greater danger than when they imagine their condition to be the most safe. The more profound their slumbers, the more secure their repose on the lap of ease and sensual enjoyment, the more liable are they to be surprised by the cry, *Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!* “While Belshazzar the king” was revelling with his “princess, his wives, and his concubines,” the hand-writing was seen upon the wall of his palace, “Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting.” While the rich man was resolving to take *his ease, to eat, and drink, and be merry*, the unwelcome summons reached his ears, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.* And while Herod, “arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne,” and received the adulation of the deluded multitude, immediately *the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*

But the call, however unexpectedly heard, must be instantly obeyed. *Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.* The wise virgins were roused from that lethargy into which they had fallen, and aimed at calling forth into lively exercise those graces which they had shamefully permitted to languish: They remembered from whence they had fallen, and cordially repented: They lamented before the Lord the loss of *their first love*, and their want of zeal in his service: They endeavoured, by the renewed exercise of faith, to fasten on the sacrifice of Jesus for the remission of their past failures, on his

righteousness as their exclusive title, and on his promises as their charter to eternal life. In the language of the royal David they ardently exclaimed, "Into thine hands we commit our spirits," to be fully sanctified, and supported, and conducted in safety to the everlasting kingdom, "for thou hast redeemed us, O Lord God of truth:" "Thou hast borne us as on eagle's wings, through the wilderness of this world, be graciously present with us as we pass over the waters of Jordan, and give us a triumphant entrance into that Canaan of eternal rest, which thou hast prepared and promised."

The exercise of every grace will be requisite in the *time of our departure*. Death is *the last enemy*, and in encountering it, *the whole armour of God* will be necessary for the christian soldier. Whatever indolence may be indulged in the season of health, and peace, and prosperity, all the energies of the spiritual life must be roused into exertion when we enter our conflict with him who is the "king of terrors," and the terror of kings. Ye virgins of light, your lamps may be neglected amidst the cares, and allurements, and enjoyments of the world, but when the shadows of the everlasting evening begin to thicken and blacken around you, these lamps must be trimmed, and fresh oil must be derived from Jesus Jehovah the fountain of all grace.

The foolish virgins also *arose, and trimmed their lamps*: They recollect the profession of the Redeemer's name which they had made before the world, "the long prayers"

which they had offered up in “the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they might be seen of men,” the seat which they had occupied in the sanctuary, the portion of their secular substance which they had devoted for the support of the ordinances of religion, and the fiery zeal which they had evinced for the purity of public worship. All these attainments formal professors will mention in the hour of judgment as the foundation of their admission to the joys of heaven, or at least with the prospect of soothing their anguish amidst the miseries of hell. “We be Abraham’s seed; we were circumcised the eighth day,” or were early initiated into the christian church by baptism. “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? We have eaten, and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.” But *the hope of the hypocrite shall be cut off, and his trust shall be as a spider’s web.* All these former advantages, however confidently relied on, or however importunately plead, will be infinitely unavailing, as appears from the following verse: *And the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil for our lamps are gone out.* The dialogue contained in this, and the succeeding verses, cannot with propriety be literally understood, neither is it necessary that it be minutely explained. It may be considered in general as expressing the alarm of the *foolish* virgins, the insufficiency of that outward profession upon which they had depended for salvation, and their solicitude to obtain relief from any quarter.

Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out; “that sandy basis, on which we founded our hopes of future happiness, has now failed us; that attendance to the outward ordinances of religion, which we deemed sufficient, now appears altogether unprofitable; this *righteousness of ours*, when weighed in the balances of the impartial Justice, and unspotted purity of Jehovah, is *found wanting*; give us an interest in your prayers; sympathize with us in this hour of our calamity; expostulate in our behalf that our former languid, lifeless discharge of duty may be forgiven, and that we may be kept from sinking a prey to the devouring flames. O that “the mountains and rocks might fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?”

How often have I witnessed the anguish, and agony of the gospel despiser, when roused by the apprehension of death! His bosom is torn alternately with remorse at the recollection of his former transgressions, and the anticipation of the future. How often have I been called to pray for them, who, in the days of their health and prosperity, could never be persuaded to offer up a prayer for themselves! Who had, perhaps, derided all religion as a delusion and dream. But the moment is coming when all *will arise and aim at trimming their lamps.* The trump of the arch-angel will arrest the attention of the most obdurate: The lightnings of the tri-

bunal will pour conviction into the consciences of the most obstinate in impiety. "Men may live fools, but fools they cannot die.

And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage. They that were ready. There is an habitual, and an actual preparation for the appearance of the Son of God. The former consists in union to his person, in remission of sin through *the sprinkling of his blood*, in reconciliation through the imputation of his perfect righteousness, in regeneration and sanctification by the agency of the Spirit of holiness. None who are thus *ready* shall be, or can be finally lost: Their names were *written from eternity in the book of life*, and the Father who elected them, and the Son who redeemed them, and the Holy Ghost who sanctifies them, all concur and co-operate in keeping them infallibly to salvation.

There is also an actual preparation, or *readiness* for the appearing of the Bridegroom. This consists in the constant, lively exercise of every gift and grace; in frequent and familiar communion with Jesus, the Mediator, in his various offices and infinite fullness; in deriving from him all that measure of spiritual life, and light, and love, and strength, and joy, which is necessary to aid us in discharging the duties of life, and entering our conflict with death. This *readiness* also consists in occasional and ardent longings for the manifestation of the Saviour, in whose presence alone perfection of holiness and blessedness is to be expected. The apostle Paul

thus desired to depart, and to be with Christ ; and he exhorted others to look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

They who were thus ready, went in with him to the marriage. The immunities of the heavenly state are expressed by a variety of language and imagery, partly to bring them down to the feebleness of our capacities, and partly to inspire us with earnest desires for the full fruition. Its honours are set forth under the emblems of a *throne*, a *crown*, and a *kingdom*, and its joys by an exemption from every thing that can annoy, and the possession of all that can contribute to our happiness. The inhabitants “shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the Sun light upon them, nor any heat : For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” The privileges of the celestial world are represented in the present instance by a *marriage*. Marriages are usually seasons of great festivity and joy ; they are also occasions of familiar intercourse and mutual expressions of friendship and affection. In heaven harmony uninterrupted, and friendship the most pure and ardent will reign for ever. They who in this world were companions in *tribulation*, in *affliction*, and *sorrow*, will there meet and mingle in the most intimate fellowship, and exult in the perfection and happiness of each other. They shall see as they are seen ; they shall know as they are known, and

they shall love one another, even as they are loved of the Father. But the consummation of the joys of the inhabitants of heaven will consist in their near approach to Jesus Jehovah, their "beloved and friend," and their fruition of the uninterrupted smiles of his countenance. "They shall see his face, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them."

And the door was shut. This expresses the complete and eternal security of the redeemed in the heavenly world: they will be established in holiness and bliss beyond the possibility of future failure. As the pleasures, to which they will then be admitted, are boundless in their nature, they are also endless in their duration. "They shall be forever with the Lord," seeing him "face to face," and participating the full pledges of his love. With enraptured heart and elevated style did the seraphic Isaiah anticipate and describe the eternity of their enjoyments in heaven. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Angels who were once the inhabitants of heaven, were permitted to apostatize, and were consequently excluded from its enjoyments: Adam, although originally placed in paradise, and there favoured with the friendship of his Creator, afterwards revolted, and thus forfeited his title to the inheritance, but the *spirits of just men made perfect*, once admitted to the vision and fruition of the Lamb in heaven, *shall go no more out*: Nothing shall

ever occur to separate between them and their God, or forfeit their charter to the inheritance of eternal life.

And the door was shut. This also expresses the abject hopelessness of the *foolish virgins* who were left without. All who *went in with him to the marriage* were secured beyond the possibility, or even peradventure of future exclusion, and they who were left without were excluded beyond the possibility of future admission. *Many I say unto you will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.* In death the condition of men individually, and at the general judgment the condition of mankind collectively shall be unalterably fixed. “When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door,” they who are within the walls of the *new Jerusalem* shall go no more out, and they who are without shall have no opportunity of entering. “These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the others into life eternal.”

Afterward came also the other virgins saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. As an expression of their respect and reverence for Jesus who is now exhibited in the capacity of Judge, these *foolish virgins* address him in the dignified character of *Lord*; as one who possesses all power both in heaven and in earth; as one who holds the “keys of hell and of death,” and is therefore legally invested with full authority to admit *to the marriage* or to exclude. The Son, as God Creator, is possessed of an authority essential

uncommunicated, uncontrouled. This extends to all being rational and irrational; animate and inanimate, in every part of the divine dominions. As Jehovah-Redeemer he possesses an authority derived, delegated to him in his mediatorial capacity, and this relates more immediately to his church, and to this world in the concerns of which the interests of his church are so intimately involved. This delegated authority the Redeemer exercises in submission to, and in conformity with the sovereign, eternal purposes of his Father. Thus we hear him appealing to his God shortly before his translation from our world, "as thou hast given him power over all flesh that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Again, the Saviour mentions to his disciples, "to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but to those for whom it is prepared of my Father."

To express their earnestness these virgins repeat the expostulation, *Lord, Lord, open to us*; "O, leave us not to perish without hope; thou hast admitted others, our acquaintances on earth, our near relatives who worshipped in the same temple, who enjoyed the instructions of the same servant addressing us in thy name, who were brought up in the same family, and often encircled the same domestic altar where the sacrifice of prayer was offered up from day to day: These are admitted to fulness of joy at thy right hand, and must we be doomed to the vengeance of eternal fire? They are now basking, and shall for ever bask in the light

of thy countenance, and must we be consigned to the blackness of darkness with weeping and wailing? Open the door to us also, and recognize us as the redeemed of thy blood, as the children of thine adopting love, as the trophies of thy sovereign, boundless grace, and heirs of that great salvation which cost thee the travail of thy soul, and a death amidst the reproaches and agonies of the cross."

No pen can describe, nor imagination paint the circumstances which will combine to aggravate the mortification and misery of the gospel-despiser in the hour when his *soul shall be required*. He will recollect alternately the privileges which he once enjoyed, the faithful sermons which he had heard, the importunity of his spiritual teacher who had often "prayed him in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God." He will recollect the many occasions in which the ambassador of Jesus had led him forward in imagination "to the judgment to come;" when he had represented to him the throne erected, the Judge descending, the dead arising, the millions of the ransomed collected *on the right hand* with joy bounding in every heart, and beaming in every eye; and the damned multitude placed *on his left hand*, pale, perplexed, self-condemned, God-condemned; he will recollect that these awful realities had been frequently brought to his view on earth, but that he had *made light* of them; that he had gone to his pleasures or business, and that for the gratifications of an evening he had bartered the

joys of an eternity, or in the pursuit of a little perishable gain he had neglected *unsearchable riches*, and *an inheritance incorruptible*; or in grasping after the bubble of the honours of this world he had lost sight of those substantial, eternal glories which are reserved in heaven for the heirs of hope. Now these infatuated, pitiable *dreamers* are convinced of their folly; they realize in the light of the judgment day, that truth, which they had often heard, but could never be persuaded duly to realize in time, that *the wages of sin is death*; that *all who are far from Jesus must perish*, and that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*; and they therefore ex postulated, *Lord, Lord, open to us*. But it is too late. They now turn their eyes upon their disease, but the remedy is gone forever, and the Physician has ceased to be gracious. They feel the torturing of their chains, but the *liberty* of the gospel is no longer proclaimed *to the captive*. They behold the storm collected, and bursting forth for their destruction, but there is no *covert* to which they may repair for shelter; they see the face of the once crucified, compassionate Saviour upon the throne; but there is no language of love in his lips, no sceptre of peace in his hand, and all negotiation between an offended God and unreconciled man is suspended forever. Therefore, notwithstanding all their importunity in supplicating, *Lord, Lord, open to us, he answered and said, verily I say unto you, I know you not;*" "*I cannot acknowledge you as my followers*

and friends ; ye did not worship me in spirit and in truth, as I required ; ye did not give me that throne in your esteem and affections to which I was entitled as your Creator, and Saviour, and Lord : You permitted the world and its cares to engross your attention to the neglect of mine ordinances, and the advancement of my glory in your generation ; therefore, when I am now come for the purpose of rendering to every man according to his works, and to be glorified in my saints, I cannot open the door, and give you an entrance into that kingdom which is prepared for them who followed me on earth, and longed for my appearing the second time for salvation. I frequently forewarned you by my servants, that whatsoever a man sowed, that he should also reap ; that he, who sowed to the flesh, should of the flesh reap corruption ; they also admonished you in my name, that if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he should be Anathema, Maranatha ; and now the glory of my justice, and holiness, and truth, demand the full and impartial execution of the sentence, and that you should be excluded from that heavenly city which is consecrated as the peculiar residence of my servants and friends : Depart, therefore, from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

This parable, like many of the others, is concluded with a pointed and affectionate admonition to all, *watch therefore, for ye know neither the day, nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.* “The end will come,” the lov-

ing, long-suffering Saviour may be considered as saying, “it is appointed unto all men once to die, and after that the judgment ; but the time *when*, or the place *where*, or the circumstances *in which* the summons of death will be offered depends wholly on the Sovereign, absolute pleasure of my Father, and is locked up among the impenetrable secrets of his throne : therefore it is your duty, and interest to *watch*, and be *always ready* for the event : improve all the means of grace, and every hour of the day of salvation as if they were the last to be expected ; occupy each talent with which the great God has intrusted you, not only with impressions of your responsibility to him, but under this impression that you know not even the day when the account of your stewardship will be required : Behold, in the exultation and bliss of the *wise virgins*, the unspeakable importance of being ever prepared for the hour of reckoning ; *they went into the marriage*, they were admitted to the fruition of those eternal pleasures which are at my right hand. Behold also, in the disappointment and consequent confusion of the others, the folly, yea, the madness of indulging a spirit of slumber and postponing the great work of salvation. They awoke to a consideration of their danger, but not until I had risen up, and shut to the door : there is an accepted time, but if this is wasted in carnal ease and sloth, all future applications for mercy will be unsuccessful, and there will remain nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation which will

consume the adversary : there is a day appointed for the sinner to make his calling and election sure, but if the hours of this day are prostituted in idleness and unconcern amidst the warnings of my word, and Spirit, and providence, there will be no future dispensation of pardon. The work assigned to me, of reconciling revolting man to his offended Prince, will soon be consummated, and all who are found enemies then, must remain enemies *still*, and be crushed as incorrigible rebels against the throne of my Father, and they must be crushed with this aggravation in their guilt that they had slighted, and trodden under foot that very blood which had flowed for their redemption.

Compassionate Saviour, crown with the efficacy of thy grace from heaven, this feeble illustration of that parable which was pronounced by thine own lips upon earth. May all who shall read these pages in this, or any following age, be enabled to *watch*, so to redeem their time, that whether the cry, *behold the Bridegroom cometh*, is made at *midnight* or midday ; more suddenly by some unexpected stroke of thy hand, or gradually by any consuming disease, they may be ready to receive it with joy, and find an entrance to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, the Infinite Author of our salvation, the writer and readers will unite in ascribing glory, and thanksgiving, dominion and praise, world without end. Amen.

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LECTURE IV.



THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

MATTHEW XXV. 14.—30.

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

But he that had received one, went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and requireth with them.

And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strayed:

*And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth:
lo, there thou hast that is thine.*

*His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and
slothful servant, thou knowest that I reap where I sowed
not, and gathered where I have not strawed:*

*Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the ex-
changers, and then at my coming I should have received
mine own with usury.*

*Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him
which hath ten talents.*

*For unto every one that hath, shall be given, and he shall
have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be ta-
ken away even that which he hath.*

*And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness:
there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

IT was frequently and very justly re-marked by those who attended the personal ministry of Messiah, that *man never spake like this man*. Wherever it was known that his person was accessible, whether he ascended the mount, or sat in the ship, or entered the synagogue, or appeared more publicly in the temple, the admiring multitude thronged around him, hanging in silent astonishment on the lips of this celestial Speaker. His discourses incomparably excel all other discourses, whether we regard the importance of the matter contained in them, or the interesting manner in which they were delivered. In order the more successfully to teach the ignorant, and awaken the attention of the secure, he employed almost every object in the natural world, and every occupation in human life as a medium for the conveyance of moral and religious instruction. To inform us that the church in her present state is a promiscuous society,

and that false professors may be frequently expected to associate with the sincere followers of the Lamb, he compares the *kingdom of heaven*, in the preceding verses, *to ten virgins*, five of whom were *foolish*: To impress upon the mind of every disciple the necessity of unremitting vigilance, of maintaining a constant readiness for the solemnities of the final judgement, he notices that *at midnight*, a season altogether unexpected, *the cry was made, behold, the Bridegroom cometh*; and that then the destiny of all, whether just or unjust, will be determined for eternity; *they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.*

Other instructions, equally interesting, are communicated in the parable which we have read as the subject of our present consideration. It is designed to instruct us that all our endowments, whether natural or acquired, are derived from Jehovah; and that every gift, whether of his providence or grace, ought to be occupied with reference to an impartial retribution in the end: It also admonishes us, that while an ample and everlasting reward is reserved for the faithful steward, *shame will be the promotion* of those who either neglect, or prostitute their trust.

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. This parable, like the one which precedes it, may be considered as pointing immediately to the nation of the Jews; they were peculiarly the servants of God by external profess-

sion; they were separated from the rest of the world, and set apart for promoting his praise in the midst of a benighted and degenerate age. Various *goods*, or talents were committed to them, because to them pertained *the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises*. But, although this parable may have a primary reference to the nation of Israel, it requires an application much more extensive, and conveys instruction infinitely and eternally interesting to *you, to me, to all*, and with this general reference, I shall aim at explaining and applying it.

The man travelling into a far country, is the Lord Jesus Christ, who after he “was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification, ascended up far above all heavens, angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto him.” “Whom,” says an apostle, “the heaven must receive until the time of restitution of all things.” The *servants* whom he called around him, previous to his departure, are the world of mankind, who were all originally created by him, and are ultimately answerable to him as their Lord; but the members of his church upon earth are more emphatically his *servants*; they are brought into a most intimate relation with him; they are distinguished with innumerable privileges, and from them a more prompt, cheerful *service*, a greater revenue of honour is reasonably expected. The *goods* delivered unto them

are all the advantages which we enjoy arising from birth, fortune, education, elevation in society, with every opportunity which is afforded us for promoting our own salvation, or advancing the temporal interests and eternal salvation of others. They are properly called *goods*, because they flow as streams from Him who is supremely and infinitely good; who is the exclusive, unexhausted source of all excellence, and felicity; they are the effusions of his bounty, and expressions of his good will; they ought to be received with emotions of gratitude, should be improved for his glory, and when properly occupied, will issue in the present and immortal *good* of the receiver. Are we favoured with health, with the exercise of the rational faculty, and with opportunities for cultivating this faculty by the aids of education, with a competency of those enjoyments which are necessary for our temporal comfort, or by the additional advantages of wealth, or office, or greater intellectual endowments, do we possess a more commanding influence over others; in the enjoyment of either, or all these gifts, we ought to realize that *both riches and honour come from God, and that in his hand is power and might*, that it is his prerogative to *make great and to give strength unto all*. It is not unworthy of notice that these benefits are particularly called *his goods*. Is Almighty God the sovereign, munificent Author?....he is also the absolute, unquestionable Proprietor. He communicated to man merely the

present use ; the temporary occupancy of the blessing, without relinquishing the title. This remains unalienated in himself, and he both possesses and claims the right of recalling it at his pleasure. This truth, habitually impressed upon the mind, would tend to regulate our conduct, both in prosperity and adversity : It would prevent the ebullitions of pride, arrogance, insolence, and extravagance amidst the smiles of divine providence, and of peevishness, impatience, discontent, and dejection under its frowns. Amidst the various vicissitudes of our lot, we would be ready to say, in the submissive language of the patriarch, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.*

The next verse presents to our view, the diversified proportion in which these gifts were distributed among the servants. *Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one.* The *talent* was a piece of money commonly used among the Jews, and so far as we can ascertain, amounted nearly to a thousand pounds of our currency. These gifts of a bounteous God are probably compared to *talents*, because of their real value in themselves, and the high estimation in which they are regarded by him. They may be considered as really precious, because when occupied with fidelity and zeal, they produce a liberal revenue of glory to the giver, and of honour and of happiness to the receiver.

To one servant he gave five talents, and to another two. This seemingly unequal distri-

bution was made, not to insinuate that some of these stewards were more deserving than others, but rather to inspire us with exalted, adoring thoughts of the independance and sovereignty of God the original proprietor. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." His absolute, uncontrollable pleasure is exclusively the rule of his administration through all parts of his dominion. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory for ever." All benefits, whether common or special, belong originally to himself, and these he dispenses *when*, and in *what measure*, and to *whomsoever* he pleases. One man he elevates to honour and influence: on another he bestows in rich profusion the bounties of his providence: another he distinguishes with greater intellectual strength, with a more persuasive or commanding utterance, and places in a situation where these endowments may be improved and expanded by all the additional advantages of human learning. As "none can stay his hand," so in contemplating the diversity of intellect, or opulence, or office, or rank which appears among men we ought not presumptuously to inquire, "what doest thou?" This variety is visible throughout all the works of Jehovah. Every flower in the field is not equally fragrant; every oak in the forest is not equally strong; every cedar is not equally majestic and towering; all the lu-

minaries of heaven do not shine with an equal degree of splendor: "there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. Inanimate matter is destined for different purposes, and therefore endowed with different qualities and forms, and even among angels, the native inhabitants of heaven, a variety of rank is established. In contemplating this higher order of intelligencies, we see "the angel and the arch-angel; thrones, and authorities, and dominions, and principalities, and powers;" some occupying a humbler and others a loftier station in fulfilling the will of the INFINITE SUPREME. If the great God evinces his sovereignty in creating distinctions in all other parts of his workmanship, why may he not exercise the same prerogative in the distribution of his *goods* among men?

To every man according to his several ability, in a proportion answerable to that station which he was appointed to fill, or that service which he was destined to perform in the church or the world. As the Lord God is adorably sovereign, he is also infinitely wise in every part of his administration. While therefore he never communicates a talent, where there is not room to exercise it, so on the other hand he never calls an individual to assume an office, civil or ecclesiastical, without imparting suitable qualifications. Moses was amply endowed with every gift which was requisite for discharging the duties of that arduous and responsible station to which

he was called as leader of the nation of Israel; the same spirit which was communicated to him, rested on the seventy elders who were added to assist him in that service. The gifts of wisdom and utterance were imparted in an extraordinary measure to the apostles of our Lord, answerable to that extraordinary office which they were appointed to fill, and those extraordinary duties which they were designed to perform as founders of the christian church. *To every man in every age is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ,* and in a proportion suited to that sphere in which it is the divine pleasure that he should move. As therefore it argues a reproachful distrust of the promise of God to decline venturing forward to any service when his providence is apparently pointing out the path, it betrays a presumptuousness the most daring and inexcusable to arrogate an office for which we were never designed; and for which we are not, in some degree, competently qualified.

The sixteenth and seventeenth verses bear an honourable testimony to the fidelity with which two of these servants improved their gifts, and discharged the various duties assigned to them. *Then he that had received the five talents, went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.* Man was originally designed by the Author of his existence for active employment, and in whatever sphere we move, or whatever endowments we possess, our time

should be redeemed in performing the different duties of that sphere, and in improving the talents committed to our trust. This diligence in our respective stations tends to the honour of our Creator, because it is an act of obedience to his command, and it is answering his design in our creation. We are required therefore, "not to be weary in well-doing; not to be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit; to be always abounding in the work of the Lord:" He that teacheth, is commanded to be diligent "in teaching, and he that exhorteth in exhortation;" and they "who are rich in this world are enjoined to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

And made them other five talents. The Lord God in his infinite condescension, and for the purpose of exciting us to cheerful and unwearied diligence in his service has intimately connected our duty and interest. "There is that scattereth, and yet encreaseth: The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." Every service which we perform, either to God or our generation, under the influence of proper motives, receives an abundant reward even in the present world. In teaching others we actually instruct ourselves: In promoting their salvation, we are at the same time promoting our own salvation, and in advancing the glory of our Creator and Re-

deemer, we are advancing our own highest glory both on earth and in heaven. Every *talent* therefore of wealth, or wisdom, or influence over others properly improved, may be compared to money which is kept in constant circulation; while it tends to the accommodation of him who receives, it is a rich source of profit to him who lends it. The Author of our existence thus regards man as a rational being, and presents rational considerations to our view; he even lures us to activity and perseverance in discharging the duties of our calling by establishing an inseparable connexion between our obligation to him and the advancement of our own honour and interest. Thus he displays the boundless benignity of his nature by promising a reward where he might absolutely require a service, and he renders obedience easy by uniting with it our own advantage both in this world and in the next. “He which soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully.” “Them that honour me,” saith God, “I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. They that are rich in this world,” while by the devotion of their wealth to purposes of piety and charity they minister to the temporal wants, and promote the spiritual interests of others, are “laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.”

The following verse presents a more forbidding character, and a picture both humiliating and melancholy. *But he that had received one talent, went and digged in the earth, and hid his Lord's money.* By his digging in the earth, and hiding his Lord's money, we may understand either a concealment of the gifts bestowed upon him; an utter neglect to employ them from motives of ease or indolence, or false modesty, or an improper use of his talents; the prostitution of them to purposes of pride and dissipation. The servant who does nothing for promoting the interests of his master may be considered as really an *idler*, as he who does nothing at all, and in the end will be regarded with the same displeasure and scorn. If we expect to secure the approbation of our judge, and the reward of faithful stewards, we must not only be industrious in redeeming our time and talents, but they must be redeemed in a manner calculated to subserve the honour of our Lord, and the advantage of his church and of our generation.

But whether the hours of our day be wasted in idleness, or actively occupied in obeying the commandments, and advancing the interests of our Master, the evening of life will ere long approach, and a reckoning be required. *After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.* It is called *a long time*. The period before the account of his stewardship was demanded, might, perhaps, appear *long* to the unprofitable servant. When judgment is not speedi-

ly executed, the heart of the sinner frequently becomes emboldened in impiety. By the postponement of the season of his retribution, he is tempted to doubt whether there will be any retribution, and from this delay he derives fresh confidence in his courses of iniquity. In the hardihood of his spirit, he sometimes wantonly asks, "where is the sign of his coming?" Notwithstanding the frequent admonitions of the word, and the impertinent warnings of the ministers of religion, all things continue as they were: I will therefore eat, and drink, and be merry: I will rejoice in the days of my youth: I will yield to the solicitations of my companions in pleasure: I will gratify each rising inclination, and dismiss to the winds every anxious thought about futurity: To-morrow will be as this day and much more abundant."

The time of the coming of their Lord probably appeared *long* to those servants who were faithful. The children of the spiritual family often become weary of this world; partly owing to the *deceitfulness of their hearts*, the imperfections which unavoidably attend their best services, the apparent uselessness of their lives, the afflictions which they frequently feel in their bodies, the toil and vexation which they experience in all the labour of their hands they often become weary with the length of their day: Like a servant oppressed with the heat, or exhausted with fatigue, they imagine that their sun lingers long above the horizon, and will never go down. David, seemingly disheartened by the vani-

ties, and bereavements, and troubles of life, exclaims in despondency of spirit "I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise. My heart is sore pained within me, and sorrow hath overwhelmed me. O, that I had wings like a dove; for then would I fly away, and be at rest." And the patriarch Job, amidst the complicated disappointments and evils of the world, indulges himself in the same melancholy strains: "As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work: So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, when shall I arise and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My soul chooseth death rather than life. I loathe it; I would not live alway: Let me alone, for my days are vanity." But while this conclusion that *his Lord delayeth his coming* arises from a principle of daring impiety and hardihood in the heart of the sinner, it also proceeds from shameful distrust and impatience on the part of the christian. The Saviour will come to the children of his adopting mercy, and call them home to the enjoyment of their reward immediately when their work is accomplished. They will be detained no longer in this dreary wilderness, exposed to scorching suns, and chilling blasts, and multiplied privations, than the Great Disposer has some important purpose to be answered in them or by them; either some active service for them to perform, or some af-

fliction to be endured by which their graces may be more fully proved and perfected.

"Rest therefore in the Lord, ye heirs of salvation, and wait patiently for him." "If need be ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Many, it may be, are your afflictions now, and in the estimation of *feeble sense*, they may appear to be continued unnecessarily *long*, but recollect that your "*days on earth are determined*, and every ingredient in your cup of sorrow is mingled by unerring wisdom, and infinitely tender mercy, and all the dispensations of your heavenly Father in relation to you will ultimately issue in honour to him, and in eternal rejoicing to you. Many parts of the divine conduct appeared dark and mysterious to the literal Israelites during their passage through the wilderness. They wandered forty years in performing a journey which they might have completed in a few months: They suffered successively through hunger, and thirst, and fatigue, and persecution from enemies. In the rebellion of their hearts against Moses and against God, they were often tempted to say, "it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." Yet, notwithstanding all their former murmurings, how did their bosoms expand with gratitude to their Great Deliverer upon reach-

ing the Canaan which was promised them? With what promptitude and cheerfulness did they assent to the appeal of Joshua, the instrument of their redemption! "Ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." And such will be the grateful acknowledgments of every spiritual Israelite upon finishing his earthly pilgrimage, and taking possession of the Canaan of everlasting rest. All that is now seemingly *crooked* in his lot will then appear straight: All that is mysterious will be unfolded to his full satisfaction: That heart which often sinks in despondency, or rises up in disputing and repining *now*, will then be filled with adoring thoughts of that wisdom, and long-suffering, and condescension which appeared in all the dealings of a covenant God, and that harp which at present is often *hanging mute upon the willow*, will for ever be tuned to the song of Moses and of the Lamb.

After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and *reckoneth with them*. Although our existence in this world is only the commencement of our being, and our continuance on earth is altogether uncertain, yet when we realize a "judgment to come," and an endless eternity of rewards and punishments, how interesting does our present existence appear! Every year, every month, every week, every day, yea, each hour must be regarded as unspeakably important, and we feel con-

strained by motives both of duty and interest to occupy every talent with which we are intrusted. And that a judgment does await us, is a fact not more soleinn than certain. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ; that every one may receive the things done in his body. Who will render to every man according to his deeds : 'To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life : But unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath ; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil.' *The lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.* Whether we possess one, or two, or five talents, an impartial account of the manner in which they are improved must hereafter be rendered.

The four following verses relate to us the satisfactory account which the two servants gave of their talents, the full approbation of their Lord, and the abundant reward which was conferred for their fidelity. Each of them is introduced as coming and saying, *Lord.* They thus recognise their subordination to him, his unquestionable right to exercise authority over them, and their responsibility to him. *Thou deliveredst unto me five talents : Thou deliveredst unto me two talents.* The endowments of every kind which they possessed, they acknowledged, were his property ; they had been committed to them only in trust as stewards, and therefore it was

altogether reasonable that they should account to him for the disposition which they had made of them. There is something truly respectful and filial in the exercise of genuine piety. A stranger to the abject servility of the slave, or the fulsome affectation of the flatterer, the christian approaches his God with the becoming submission, and the unfeigned affection of a child. *Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents, behold I have gained besides them, five talents more.* “Every gift committed to me in trust, I have aimed at occupying for the end for which it was bestowed: I have endeavoured conscientiously to read thy word from day to day, to sanctify thy Sabbath, to obey thy commandments, and to walk in thine ordinances as means which thy wisdom and sovereignty prescribed for promoting my conversion and salvation: any knowledge which I possessed in the mysteries of thy word or providence, I aimed at employing, in a manner suitable to my station, in teaching the ignorant, in comforting the disconsolate, in animating those who were exercised to Godliness, and in impressing upon all the things which concerned their everlasting welfare. The wealth which through thy munificence I was enabled to acquire in attending with diligence to the duties of my secular calling, I have not wasted in the gratification of the flesh, nor through a distrust of thy providence, anxiously treasured up as an inheritance for my children after me, but in obedience to thy command, I cheerfully devoted a portion of it to the ad-

vancement of thy kingdom, and in promoting the best interests of mankind. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame ; I dealt out my bread to the hungry, and brought into my house the poor that were cast out ; when I saw the naked, I clothed them ; and I satisfied the afflicted soul."

This master, who is much more delighted in commending the faithful servant, than in censuring the slothful ; who takes more pleasure in the dispensation of rewards than in the infliction of punishment, replies to him in terms of prompt and cordial approbation, *well done, thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things ; I will make thee ruler over many things* ; "I will now advance thee to a larger sphere of exertion, and usefulness ; I will translate thee from this lower world, where thou art assailed by so many difficulties, liable to be infected by the contagion of evil example, or led astray by a *deceitful heart of unbelief* ; from all these afflictions and embarrassments, I will now translate thee to those regions where all the spirits of the just made perfect reside, and to which my own glorified humanity is exalted. There all thy graces shall have ample room for expanding, and shall through eternal ages be attaining to higher degrees of perfection : There thou shalt see without a cloud ; thou shalt serve without imperfection ; thou shalt enjoy without interruption, and become equal to the angels in the ardour of thy love, and in the consummation of thy holiness and bliss."

Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. Thou

didst follow me in the regeneration ; thou wast not ashamed of my gospel, but didst patiently suffer reproach for my name's sake ; thou didst not recoil at the cross, but didst aim at taking it up with submission at the call of my providence ; as therefore thou hast been a partaker with me in the labours, and sorrows, and tribulations, and persecutions of earth, I now invite thee to a full participation with myself in the honours and pleasures of my heavenly kingdom. Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am ; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." It is worthy of notice that no distinction is made between these servants in the distribution of the rewards. Although one had been entrusted with *two* talents, and the other with *five*, yet as they had manifested equal fidelity in advancing the interests of their Lord, they received equal assurances of his good will, and were promoted to the participation of equal immunities in his kingdom.

How common is it in the world for individuals to decline doing any thing of a public or liberal nature, because their abilities for doing are not equal to the abilities of others around them. Because they have not the opportunities of doing *great* things, they will therefore attempt to do nothing. But this is a great mistake ; our master requires according to what a man hath. He does not expect the servant to whom he delivered *one* talent to occupy *two*, nor the man to whom he delivered *two* talents to occupy *five*. *The poor*

widow, whose whole *living* consisted of *two mites* was not expected in her contributions to equal those who gave of their *abundance*. It is in the power of every individual to do much for advancing the cause of Jesus, and of their generation. If all are not endowed with the gifts of wisdom and utterance for preaching the gospel, and exhorting from house to house; if all are not elevated to stations of eminence and vested with authority to command or enjoin; if all are not possessed of worldly affluence, and thus able of their *abundance to cast into the treasury* for translating the scriptures, or sending abroad the messengers of the cross to make known the Saviour's name, all may pray for the peace and prosperity of his church; all may adorn his gospel in their respective circles by meekness, by purity, by long-suffering, and in doing these things they may occupy their talent and receive in the end the honourable appellation of *good and faithful servants.*

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, *Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed.* The spirit evinced by this servant is by no means uncommon in the world. Many imagine that whatever they possess, whether received by hereditary right, or acquired by their own successful enterprize and industry is absolutely their own property, and altogether at their own disposal. When therefore a share of their secular substance is required for executing any pious or benevo-

lent purpose, they reject the demand as *hard*: Instead of voluntarily devoting a portion of their wealth as the interest of a loan which their Lord had made to them, they rather startle at the claim as extravagant and unjust: They frequently reply to him who asks it in the name of his Master, "our wealth is our own; we derived it as an inheritance from our fathers, or obtained it by means of our own exertions and good management, and have a right to enjoy it at our pleasure." They either indulge an avaricious spirit, and are constantly endeavouring to enlarge their possessions by "adding house to house," or yielding to inordinate appetites, they spend their wealth in sensual enjoyments, and have nothing to spare. As riches increase they feel themselves justified in "faring more sumptuously," and thus consume upon their lusts what belongs to the Lord and should be consecrated to his glory. He who appeals to their generosity in behalf of the poor, or for the means of promoting the kingdom of Jesus is instantly and indignantly impeached as *an hard man, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strewed.* This disposition, which is secretly cherished and openly manifested by thousands in every age, arises from a single mistake. They do not realize their absolute and entire dependance upon Almighty God. They do not realize that he gave them existence and preserves them in life; that he is the exclusive Lord of the earth which they occupy; that he gives them *discretion* for the management of their

secular concerns ; that he imparts strength to them for the pursuit of their respective vocations, and afterwards crowns their enterprise with success ; *that both riches and honour come of him and that he reigneth over all.*

But as piety and disinterestedness are their own reward ; as the cheerful discharge of our duty to God and our generation carries along with it a certain and ample compensation, so a contracted, selfish, impious temper and conduct are their own punishment. “Who hath hardened himself against the Almighty and prospered.” *His Lord answered and said unto him, thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knowest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed ; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.* The *slothful servant* is here pronounced a *wicked servant*, and as such is condemned of his Lord. The consideration that we conduct with civility ; that we are honest, inoffensive members of society will not justify us in the estimation of our Judge. The *fig-tree* which stood barren in a fertile soil, under the cultivating hand of the husbandman, was considered as *cumbering the ground*, and was doomed to be *cut down*. “He that is not with me,” saith the Son of God, “is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.” It is not enough that “we cease to do evil,” but we must “learn to do well.” The omission of any duty required is no less a contempt of the divine authority,

than the violation of the most explicit command. Whatever be the number of the talents committed to us, we must occupy them with all diligence until the coming of our Lord. The means of grace with which we are favoured in divine providence, must be carefully improved in promoting our own salvation, and all the advantages which we enjoy, whether they arise from the possession of wisdom, or wealth, or station, must be improved in advancing the temporal and immortal interests of others. By this fidelity in the discharge of every incumbent duty, we *put our money to the exchangers*, and then our Lord at his approach can receive his own with usury.

In the succeeding verse we see the punishment inflicted on the slothful servant, and the additional honours conferred on him who had been faithful. *Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.* This threatening is sometimes executed in the present world. Influence arising from rank, or office, or other advantages, when not employed in promoting the cause of piety and virtue, is often taken from the man who possesses it. We frequently see his reputation blighted, his standing in society forfeited, and the individual himself at last sinking into abject contempt: And riches, wasted in the wanton gratification of the flesh, or eagerly heaped up for futurity and refused for the execution of measures in which the honour of God and the welfare of man are involved, are frequently and sud-

denly wrested from the possessor. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away and lo! he was not ; yea, I sought him but he could not be found." Also when an individual or a church neglect or undervalue the ordinances of religion, these are either taken from them or they are taken from the ordinances. Thus a jealous God admonishes the church of Ephesus : " Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I will come unto thee quickly and remove thy candlestick out of his place except thou repent."

But this threatening will be executed in its full and awful import in the eternal world. Then the sinner will be utterly and everlasting-ly deprived of all his personal comforts, and of every opportunity for promoting his own welfare or the interests of others. The bible which he had neglected ; the sabbath which he had wasted in idleness, or profaned by worldly employments, and the ministry of reconciliation which he had slighted shall be enjoyed by him no more forever, and the wealth which he had treasured up for a future day must be resigned to the possession of others. "For yet a little while and the wicked shall not be ; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place and it shall not be."

And give it unto him that hath ten talents : For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that

which he hath. The smiles of a bennignant providence frequently rest on those who are conscientious in discharging their duty in the various relations of life. Riches increase as they are expended in the service and for the honour of God, and he who exerts in the cause of virtue and religion a little influence, which he possesses, is frequently elevated to some situation in which his influence becomes more extensive. Or if a wise and sovereign God does not reward the faithful steward with temporal honours or affluence, he communicates other blessings which are more conducive to his real advantage. But this reward shall be fully conferred on the sincere, disinterested followers of Jesus at the judgment, and in the joys of the eternal world. Every sacrifice of ease or interest which they now make in obedience to his command, or from motives of zeal for his glory, shall be infinitely overbalanced by those honours and pleasures to which they will be advanced in the kingdom of their Father. "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The sentence passed against the unfaithful steward is committed to others, probably to holy angels, for execution. These exalted intelligencies who are employed as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation,

who protect them in danger, who comfort them in their distresses, who supply them in the season of want, and at death *carry* their souls to *Abraham's bosom*, are also employed as executioners of divine vengeance on the vessels of wrath when fitted for destruction. *Cast ye the unprofitable servant*: He has lived uselessly on earth; he has exhausted his days in vanity, and his substance he has wasted in "fulfilling the desires of the flesh," or treasured up for heirs who are to succeed him, and has done nothing for that God who created him, for Jesus who redeemed him, or for his generation to which he stood intimately connected as a member of the human family, and therefore as his life has been a scene of vanity, let his end be vexation. He has been living without God, and now let him die without hope. *Cast ye him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Light in scripture is frequently employed as the emblem of peace, of prosperity, and joy, and darkness is therefore designed to express disappointment, degradation, and misery. The ungodly will hereafter be bereaved of all their present enjoyments, and doomed to the endurance of torments both exquisite in their nature, and endless in their duration. "The wicked shall be turned into hell: Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" will be inflicted and that for ever, "upon every soul of man that doeth evil; upon the Jew first, and also upon the Gentile."

"O my God, gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with unrighteous men:

Through thine abundant, overflowing mercy,
 enlightening, and sanctifying, and assisting,
 let me live the life of the just, and with them,
 however few, or insignificant, or contemptible,
 or sorrowful they appear in this world,
 may I be numbered in that day when thy
 jewels are made up; when thy redeemed of
 all nations, and kindreds, and people, and
 tongues are collected into one general assembly;
 and to thee, most Holy Father, with thy
 Son, our infinitely condescending Saviour,
 and the Spirit of all consolation, the THREE
 in ONE, shall the glory be attributed throughout
 all ages, world without end. Amen.

O sweet employ! to sing and trace
 Th' amazing heights and depths of grace;
 To spend, from sin and sorrow free,
 A blissful, vast eternity.

O, what a grand, exalted song,
 When every tribe and every tongue,
 Redeem'd by blood, with Christ appear,
 And join in one full chorus there.

My soul anticipates the day,
 Would stretch her wings and soar away;
 To aid the song, the palm to bear
 And bow, the chief of sinners there.

LECTURE V.



THE PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

LUKE XIII. 6.—9.

He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it:

And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

THE mode of instruction among the nations of the east, and particularly among the Jews, was chiefly by parables: the speaker, in order more deeply to engage the attention of his audience, employed some object which was familiar to their senses as the representation of moral or spiritual truth, and thus through the medium of their bodily organs he conveyed important instructions to their hearts. Sages among the heathen, prophets under the Old Testament, and our Divine Redeemer, while *he tabernacled in our world*, usually conversed in this manner. *The soner* of the natural seed is employed to represent *the Son of man* as a prophet preaching *righteousness in the great congregation*; *the field* to point out *the world*; *the good seed* to denote *the children of the*

kingdom, and the tares the children of the wicked one; the enemy sowing these tares is designed to represent the devil; the harvest the end of the world, and the reapers the holy angels. In some instances the meaning of the parable was obvious at its first delivery, in others more obscure and difficult in its application to exercise the faith and patience of the hearers. Among all the parables uttered by our adorable Lord, few contain instruction more important and awful, than the one which we have read as the subject of our present meditations.

Commentators in general, and with great propriety, apply this parable to the Jewish nation. They were *as a fig-tree* planted in the vineyard of Jehovah, being early taken into a covenant relation with himself, brought into the sacred enclosure of his church, and distinguished with many and important privileges. “He gave his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel, he hath not dealt so with any nation.” The “three years,” mentioned in the seventh verse, are usually considered as relating to the period of our Lord’s ministry among the Jews; the time which intervened between his baptism by John and his sufferings and death on Calvary. The great husbandman is represented as expecting *fruit those three years*, because their advantages were peculiarly great: “God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past to the fathers by the prophets,” at that time addressed them *by his own Son*. The Lord

of glory, clothed in human nature, laboured personally among them ; afforded the most luminous example of piety to God and good will to men ; spake the oracles of his Father with a zeal, and purity, and power, such as *man never spake*, and enforced the doctrines of his mouth with many and splendid miracles of his hands. But where was their fruit amidst opportunities so rare and precious ? When the great husbandman “looked these three years that this vineyard should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes.” This nation returned enmity for love ; the more they were entreated, the more they opposed, and instead of embracing the doctrines delivered by the compassionate Saviour, they exclaimed with a rage more than infernal, *crucify him, crucify him*, and at last imbrued their hands in his blood. When we apply *the three years* mentioned in the parable to the personal ministry of our Lord among the Jews, the sentence afterwards denounced, *cut it down*, alludes to their rejection as a nation. *Wrath came upon them to the very uttermost* for crucifying the Lord of glory, and obstinately resisting his gospel as afterwards preached by the apostles. “And when they opposed themselves and blasphemed, he, (Paul,) shook his raiment, and said unto them, your blood be upon your own heads : I am clean ; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.” At that moment the Jewish nation as a barren fig tree was virtually *cut down* ; the lamp of ordinances was blown out ; the common operations of the Holy Ghost were restrain-

ed, and deluded Israel sealed up in ignorance and impenitence *until the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in.* This curse was more visibly executed in the destruction of their city, about forty years after the ascension of our Lord. The judgment denounced by the prophet was then literally fulfilled, "I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard ; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up ; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down." Nearly eighteen hundred years, to pursue the metaphor used in the parable, they have been as a tree withered to the root ; "they have been an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word among all nations whither the Lord has driven them."

Suffer me to remark on this passage that the Lord God, in righteous indignation, sometimes unchurches a congregation or a nation at once ; after he has long tried them with a pure dispensation of his gospel ; after he has dealt with them by judgments and mercies, by ordinances and providences without any visible amendment, he suddenly delivers them up as incorrigible ; he concludes of them as he did of Ephraim, "he is joined to his idols, let him alone ;" he *removes his candlestick*, and no longer tortures them with that light against which they shut their eyes ; he withdraws that spirit in his convincing and alarming influences which they had industriously quenched, and gives them up to final impenitence and unconcern. Such was the judgment of which he forewarned the church of Ephesus,

and under the weight of which it has groaned seventeen hundred years past. "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Brethren, does it not become us as a congregation to take the alarm? Have we not reason to apprehend that this awful judgment is awaiting ourselves? In Salem the tabernacle of the Lord of hosts was early erected; the lamp of ordinances was lighted up at the first settlement of the town, and has shown ever since with little interruption, while the neighbouring settlements remained in a great measure destitute of this heavenly *vision*; but are we walking *as the children of the light*? We have been exalted above others in external opportunities—are we proportionably exalted above them by our knowledge in the mysteries of the gospel, by the blamelessness of our conduct, by the purity and heavenliness of our conversation? The Lord is my witness, that it occasions *great heaviness and almost continual sorrow in my heart*, to notice the visible and increasing proofs of spiritual decay. *Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord savingly revealed* from Sabbath to Sabbath? There is little evidence that the gospel preached is *the wisdom of God or the power of God to the salvation of hearers*. Amidst the eagerness of worldly pursuit, who are giving diligence to make their calling and election sure? Who are striving to take the king-

dom of heaven by violence, and *labouring for the meat which endureth to everlasting life?* Amidst the frequent and anxious inquiries “what shall we eat, what shall we drink, wherewithal shall we be clothed,” who are heard to inquire, how shall I escape *the wrath that is to come*, how shall I *fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life?* The gospel, we have reason to fear, is losing its efficacy on the souls of many. Are not some becoming more indifferent about attending the means of salvation? Are not many individuals living without the fear of God, and families without the voice of prayer and praise? Have not some who once named the name of Jesus, by partaking the common and special privileges of his house, in a great measure turned their back upon both? *Ye that make mention of the Lord, of whom I know there is a precious remnant; ye whose hearts are warm with love to his name and zeal for his honour, keep not silence in this day of darkness and gloominess; be awakened to double earnestness, striving with Israel’s God for his gracious return; give him no rest until he arise and grant a time of refreshing from his presence.* The prospect of natural famine would be awful: was it foretold by a messenger of the Lord that the next year *our heavens should become as brass and our earth as iron*, that the staff of life should be cut off, that the pastures should be parched in the fields, that the corn should perish in the valleys and the fruit fail in the orchards, what alarm would instantly spread! What pale-

ness would gather on every countenance, and agony rend every heart! But is not the prospect of a spiritual famine infinitely more awful? How melancholy, how melting is even the apprehension that there should be a *want not of bread nor of water, but of the word of the Lord*; that Zion's provision should fail and that the bread of immortal life should no longer be enjoyed in the sanctuary? Brethren, this is no unreal terror. Without a suitable improvement of our privileges, this judgment may be apprehended, it must be expected, it must be expected speedily. *The day of the Lord*, of his visitation for mercies misimproved, so cometh as a thief in the night. Read the doom which was long since executed upon the church in Sardis; and be it remembered that the Lord God is as faithful to his threatenings now, as he was in ages that are past; he is no less righteous to take vengeance on a lukewarm, formal church in Salem, than on a lukewarm, formal church in Sardis. "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars, I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead. Remember, therefore, how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

The eighth verse presents to our view the intercession of the vine-dresser in behalf of that tree and his resolution to persevere in dil-

igently cultivating it. *Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it.* This may be applied to our Lord, who earnestly implored mercy in behalf of the Jews, his betrayers and murderers ; even when his blood was flowing by their *cruel hands*, his soul ascended in ardent intercession for their salvation, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* He expostulated that the sin which they were then committing might not be *laid to their charge* ; that his blood which they were shedding with unrelenting fury might rest not on their heads as a curse, but on their consciences for pardon and reconciliation. It may also allude to the fervent wrestlings of the apostles in behalf of their deluded brethren the Jews. Stephen with his expiring breath implores forgiving mercy ; *he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge,* and Paul would willingly have been “accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh.”

This parable is concluded by presenting to us the submission of the vine-dresser to the will of his Lord ; “If it bear fruit, well ; if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” This corresponds in part to the words of our Saviour himself. He who had often intreated with the Jews ; who had *offered up strong cries and tears in* their behalf, for their temporal welfare and eternal salvation, at last delivers them up to the vengeance of his Father. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem—how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her

wings, but ye would not ; Behold, your house is left unto you desolate ; and verily I say unto you, ye shall not see me until the time come when ye shall say blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Such also was the acquiescence of the apostles in the doom of their obstinate, incorrigible countrymen. "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said, it was necessary that the word of God should have been first spoken to you;" it was proper in order to display the abounding grace of Jehovah that your nation, which *murdered the Prince of life*, should enjoy the first offers of reconciliation through his blood; *but seeing ye put it from you*, since ye repeatedly and obstinately resist these tenders of mercy, *lo, we turn to the Gentiles*; they consent to their rejection as a nation; they acquiesce that this *natural olive*, barren and withered, *should be cut off*, and that the *Gentiles, (the wild olive,) might be grafted in.*

Although this parable has an immediate reference to the Jewish nation during the ministry of our Lord, and their future destruction, yet it may be considered as referring to the gospel church, or to the professors of religion in all ages---The parables, like the prophecies of scripture, frequently admit of a twofold application.—They relate to some particular object immediately in view, or to some event shortly to be accomplished, and through these they contemplate another object more general, and another event to take place in a different country or distant age. The parable of the sower is evidently of this nature. *The sower* primarily pointed

out the Son of man, from whom, as the glorious prophet of his church, all her doctrines are derived; this sover alluded remotely to the ministers of reconciliation in every future age; they go forth in the name of Jesus, dispensing the word of life, scattering around the incorruptible seed from which, through his blessing, springs up an abundant harvest to his own praise and the salvation of many. To this class belongs the parable which we design as the subject of our present consideration. Although it immediately respected the posterity of Abraham, their exalted privileges under the ministry of our Lord, and their final rejection as his peculiar people, yet it remotely points to all nations in all ages under a pure dispensation of the gospel.

A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard. A vineyard both naturally and beautifully represents the visible church: it is the object of the husbandman's particular attention, it is carefully fenced around, and thus not only distinguished from the other parts of his heritage, but secured *from the boar of the wood*, or whatever might either deface the beauty or devour the fruit of its trees. The church, in like manner, is peculiarly the object of the divine attention and concern. “The Lord’s portion is his people and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance; I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” The church has

her wall cast around both for distinction and defence ; by her discipline and government she is distinguished from the world in general, and the *precious* are separated from the *vile*. A vineyard is highly cultivated ; the husbandman usually occupies more time, and incurs greater expence in improving this, than the other parts of his inheritance : he is careful to enrich the soil, to cultivate the trees and uses every mean that is apparently adapted to render them fruitful.—The church also is highly favored of the Lord, and in point of outward privilege exalted incomparably above the rest of the world. *You only*, saith the Lord of hosts, addressing his professing people, *you only have I known of all the families of the earth* ; “I have distinguished you with my gospel, with the ministry of peace, with the common operations of my spirit, with various means of grace and the free offers of future glory, while the rest of the world, like the trees of the forest, are left to the rudeness and barrenness of their natural state, “being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Again, the husbandman entertains much higher expectations of advantage from his vineyard, than from the other parts of his heritage. In proportion to all the time, and toil, and expence which he bestows in fencing it around, in enriching the soil or pruning the trees, does he expect that fruit will be returned in its season. The living God, in like

manner, expects a greater revenue of glory, more abundant returns of love and gratitude and praise from the members of his church, than from the rest of the world ; and he is disappointed and grieved when these returns are not made. How affecting is the following appeal of Jehovah, respecting Israel his professing people, under the emblem of a vineyard ? " What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it ? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes ? "—Again, he complains by the same prophet, " I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against me : The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib," " the very beasts of the field do service to their owner, and are grateful to the hand which feeds them ;" *but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.*

The *figtree* here mentioned denotes the hearers of the gospel, and more especially the open professors of religion. They *are planted in the vineyard* when they are brought into the church by the ordinance of baptism ; when by the power of the word preached, and the common influences of divine grace they are restrained in some degree from the pollutions of the world, and yield themselves up to the Lord. *The certain man* planting *this fig-tree* is our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom, as Mediator of the covenant, the administration of the gospel is wholly committed. To reward his former humiliation and sufferings *all power in heaven and earth are given unto*

him; he erects a church in our world, he institutes with infinite wisdom and regulates with adorable sovereignty every thing appertaining to this church; he qualifies *pastors according to his own heart* for dispensing the word of life; he furnishes her with doctrines, and discipline, and worship, thus affording her every outward means that is necessary for promoting the order, instruction, and salvation of her members. "The Father loveth the Son and hath committed all things into his hand. He is the head over all things to the church which is his body; the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

And he came and sought fruit theron. The Son of man is no indifferent spectator of his church upon earth; he walks in *the midst of the seven golden candlesticks*, and marks with awful jealousy the conduct of all who sit under their light; of all who enjoy the privileges of his house and are called by his name; he notices whether their progress in knowledge and grace bears any suitable proportion to the opportunities enjoyed. Men frequently sit with ease and indifference under the ministry of the world; regard the voice of the preacher as a *pleasant song*; attend the sanctuary as a piece of civility, or with the design of passing an hour; they give themselves no anxiety about embracing that Savior who is offered, or laying up "*the word of God in their hearts*," they are as perfectly indifferent whether they attend ordinances, or whether the gospel be embraced when they do attend, as if the message of

wrath or reconciliation had no relation to them; but however indifferent they are about the improvement of these ordinances, the Lord of glory is not indifferent ; the blessings of salvation were costly beyond expression to him, being procured by no other price than the effusion of his own blood, he therefore notices what improvement is made of them ; whether our hearts are suitably impressed with redeeming love ; whether we cordially accept that salvation which he accomplished by a painful death upon the cross ; and whether we *walk worthy of him who hath called us to glory and virtue.* *He came and sought fruit thereon* ; he went “ down into the garden of nuts, to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded ;” he is really, though invisibly, present in this worshipping assembly to mark the frame of each individual, and he will shortly *come in the clouds of heaven to give every man according to his works.*

And found none. This tree, planted in a fertile soil, hedged around from all that might injure it, cultivated with particular care and skill, watered with the refreshing showers of heaven and warmed with the genial beams of the sun, STOOD BARREN ; it probably abounded with leaves, appeared flourishing to the eye of a distant observer, but upon close examination was found utterly destitute of fruit ; it perhaps presented some blossoms in spring but those gradually withered away and only served to aggravate the disappointment of the proprietor. This tree is a very affecting and

awful emblem of multitudes in the visible church. They occupy a place in the house of God : *they sit as his people sit* ; they unite in the external parts of his worship, but advance no farther ; they are never savingly convinced of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment ; they are almost persuaded to be christians, but they do not actually close with Jesus for pardon and life ; conscience is occasionally startled under the powerful application of the law, or some fearful visitation of providence, but these wounds are slightly healed up ; instead of improving the balm of gilead and the physician there, they have recourse to some regal performances, to their repentance, their prayers, and on these attainments they sit down two-fold more the children of hell, than formerly. *The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard. Ministers are workers together with God in managing his church upon earth ; they are called to labour in his vineyard, when they are solemnly set apart to serve at the altar, “to warn the unruly, to comfort the feeble minded, to reprove, to rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.” The ministers of reconciliation are emphatically called *labourers in, or dressers of the vineyard*, being required, as much as possible, to leave the common employments of the world and to spend their time and strength within the inclosure of the church ; they have authority from Christ the adorable proprietor to

dress his vineyard, to cut off with the discipline of his house, as with a pruning knife, the withered, rotten branches, and to cultivate those which bear fruit that they may bring forth more fruit.

Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none. *Behold,* this exclamation is frequently employed in scripture, and is designed to rouse the attention of the hearer; to prepare him for the reception of some truth new and interesting. Sometimes it denotes grief, sometimes joy, and sometimes astonishment. In the present instance it may be considered as expressing equally emotions of wonder and grief; of wonder at the stupidity, the infatuation, and even madness of men, that although *wise as serpents* in the concerns of time, they are more stupid than the *ostrich or the stork* in the great interests of eternity. They *will not come to Jesus that they may have life*; amidst the most faithful warnings from the word, and spirit, and providence of God, they suffer *their harvest to pass, their summer to end* without a serious thought about their salvation. The exclamation, *behold*, also expresses grief for their ruin which is speedily and unavoidably approaching. “He beheld the city and wept over it; saying, if thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

These three years I come. A particular period is here mentioned to shew that the Lord God knows exactly the opportunities that

have been enjoyed by any person or people; he *has written in his volume* how long such a man or woman has lived under the means of grace; how many admonitions or entreaties have sounded in their ears; how often they have quieted conscience or grieved the spirit by dismissing their serious impressions to a *more convenient time*. “Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, it is a people that do err in their hearts and they have not known my ways.”

Cut it down. After this fig-tree had long remained barren, and all means for restoring it to usefulness had failed, the proprietor commands that *the axe be laid to the root* and that it be immediately cut off. This evidently points out the destruction which finally awaits the ungodly. *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.* This judgment is sometimes executed in the present life: a righteous God, having strived with the sinner in vain, at last leaves him to his own delusions, withdraws from him the restraining influences of his grace, and ceases either to reprove or exhort. *Why should they be stricken any more? they will only revolt more and more.* The transgressor, thus forsaken of God, is virtually *cut off*; although he may continue naturally alive, yet, in a spiritual sense, he is *twice dead*; conscience becomes *seared as with a hot iron*, and ordinances and providences are equally unprofitable; the administration of the gospel, however pure or powerful, like the dropping of water on the rock, makes no visible impression, or like the

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falling of rain on the barren sand, is not attended with any fruit. This curse was fearfully executed upon the obstinate Israelites as a warning to those “who should afterwards live ungodly. I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged, but there shall come up briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.”

This curse is executed fully and formally in death. While the sinner is spared in the land of the living he enjoys many privileges; the light of the gospel, however neglected, shines around his tabernacle; the offers of salvation, although slighted, are saluting his ears; the dews of divine grace, although accompanied with no lasting effects, occasionally descend around his camp; *the prayers of the upright*, however disregarded or spurned, frequently ascend to *the mercy seat* in his behalf: But in death he is utterly separated from all these privileges and consigned to endless despair. “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Bear with me, beloved brethren, if I depart from the subject a few moments by remarking,

1st. That the sentence is often executed suddenly. *The Son of man cometh in an hour that ye think not.* The youth is snatched away “in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet; his breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow:” The rich are hurried off in the midst of their pros-

perity ; when they imagine themselves increased with goods and standing in need of nothing ; when they are resolving to take their ease, to eat, to drink and be merry, the message bursts unwelcome upon their ears, prepare to meet your God : The children of mirth receive their summons in the very moment of their intoxicating pleasures ; the gayeties of the dance or the theatre are exchanged for the solemnities of the judgment seat ; the cup of pleasure drops from their hand and is replaced "with the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation ;" and the sportive, enchanting music is succeeded by the voice of the insulted, indignant Saviour, "depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire. He that being often reproved and hardeneth his neck shall SUDDENLY be cut off; for when they shall say, peace and safety, then SUDDEN destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

2d. This sentence is executed irresistibly. There is no possibility of standing when the Lord God cometh forth in fury. The heart that was once harder than adamant, is melted in a moment ; the neck which stood more stubborn than the iron sinew, is instantly broken ; the tongue which was loud in vain boasting and blasphemy, falters and becomes silent as the grave ; the arm which was lifted up in defiance of earth and heaven, instantly drops to rise no more. "I kill and I make alive ; I wound and I heal ; neither is

there any that can deliver out of my hand. If I whet my glittering sword and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies and reward them that hate me." Is the feeble insect easily crushed by the falling rock, or the feather swept down by the swelling torrent, or the tallest cedar torn to pieces by the lightnings of heaven?—with an ease infinitely greater is the youngest, the strongest, the hardiest, the mightiest of mortals crushed by the arm of almighty God. "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him."

3d. This sentence is executed *irreversibly*; and places the sinner beyond the reach of hope for ever and ever. *He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall be destroyed without remedy.* There is no reversion of the decree when once executed; there is no redemption for the soul when once damned. The purpose of the Eternal, like an impassible gulph, separates heaven and hell, so that they who would pass from the former to the latter cannot: Was it possible for holy angels or men to look down from their mansions in glory and pity the implacable enemy of God, they could not pass over to relieve him, and the wretched inhabitants of hell, bound hand and foot, cannot pass from thence to heaven. You cannot mention to me a condition in this world which is altogether desperate. The man who has squandered his fortune

may possibly regain it by industry and economy ; he who has lost his good name by violence or fraud may retrieve it by a course of upright, virtuous conduct ; even the man who has forfeited his life to civil justice may find an everlasting refuge by making his peace with God through the mediation of Jesus ; but damnation, if you will allow the expression, is a disease without a cure ; it is ruin without any possible relief or remedy. Does the sinner survey the region of hell around him, he finds none that either *can* or *would* pity him ; there is no tender eye to drop a tear over his misery, nor soothing voice to impart consolation into his ears. Like the prodigal in the parable, he *begins to be inward and no man gives unto him.* Does he lift up his eyes towards heaven and ask the sympathy of his former acquaintances or friends now in bliss, they would reply to him as Abraham to the rich man, “son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, but now thou art tormented without abatement or end.” Does he look for mercy to God the Judge of all, or Jesus the Mediator, they would only *laugh at his calamity*, and frown him deeper into the flames. “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”

Why cumbereth it the ground? The word which we translate *cumbereth* can scarcely be expressed in its full meaning. It does not signify merely to stand useless and unprofitable, or to fill up the place on which another might

grow to the advantage of the proprietor, but it properly signifies *to destroy or make the ground of no effect*; the inspired evangelist probably intended to represent it as absorbing the juices of the earth, and by a kind of deadly influence blasting the fruit of the neighbouring trees. No man can be considered a mere blank in the visible church; the loose, carnal professor is not only useless, but pernicious; he is not only unprofitable to God by failing to answer the end of his creation and redemption, but is actually a reproach and injury to his cause upon earth; his irregular walk, and conversation prove a stumbling block to the righteous, and embolden others in iniquity. The professor of religion, who doth not abound *with the fruits of righteousness to the glory and praise of God*, is a real dishonour by his barrenness; as we conclude that there must be a defect either in the soil or climate, or some other circumstance, when the tree stands from season to season without bearing any fruit.

And he answering said, lord, let it alone this year also. These words express the unfeigned grief of the *vinedresser* upon hearing the doom that was denounced against this tree, and his intercession that it might be spared for another experiment. *Let it alone;* “overlook the circumstance of its barrenness; afford it a spot in thy vineyard until another season of bearing; peradventure it will disappoint thy fears and reward thy patience with abundant fruit.” The faithful shepherd is particularly anxious for the welfare of his

flock ; a concern for the interest of his master constrains him to watch with unwearied care that none of them should perish ; a humane physician feels for the patient under his direction ; he sympathises with him in distress, and uses every probable means for restoring him to health ; the bowels of a tender mother move towards a beloved child in jeopardy of its life ; how eagerly would she snatch it from the brink of some fathomless gulph, or the fury of a devouring flame ; but incomparably more anxious is the humane, conscientious pastor for the salvation of souls committed to his care. *He watches over them* not only as *one who must give an account* to God for his fidelity, but as one who really pities their delusion, and secretly recoils at the thought of their destruction. With unfeigned sincerity he can appropriate the language of the prophet, “I have not desired the evil day thou knowest. The priests the ministers of the Lord” are commanded “to weep between the porch and the altar, and say, spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach.”

Till I shall dig around it and dung it. “Till I examine its roots to discover what can be the particular cause of its defect, and try other methods for restoring it to fruitfulness.” The vinedresser was willing to persevere year after year in cultivating this tree, and try experiment after experiment to see if it could not be rendered profitable to the husbandman. The ambassador of Jesus will *reprove and rebuke and exhort with all long-*

suffering and doctrine. Former disappointments will only excite him to greater diligence and importunity in time to come. Although *the bones in the valley are many and very dry*, yet he will continue to prophecy ; he will earnestly expostulate, *O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord*, encouraged by a PERADVENTURE that *the breath may yet enter* and they become spiritually alive. “I endure all things for the elect’s sake that they may obtain salvation which is in Christ Jesus with everlasting glory.” No fatigue, no reproach, or poverty are regarded, while there remains a probability, even a possibility that they may repent and be saved. When he contemplates the immense value of the human soul ; when he realizes its inconceivable capacity for happiness in the enjoyment of Jehovah, or misery under the pressure of his wrath ; when he looks forward in imagination through the lapse of myriads of ages, and views it as either approaching nearer to God in a perfection of bliss, or sinking deeper in the gulph of perdition ; when these things are duly realized, the pastor will be ready to exclaim of each hearer, *how shall I give thee up ? How shall I cease to instruct, and exhort, and admonish ? I cannot deliver thee up to thy present ignorance, or obstinacy, or sensuality with the belief that thou shouldst fall a prey to the second death and the damnation of hell. I could wish that myself were accursed*

*from Christ for my brethren;** I could submit to any suffering either outward or inward for a time, could I only be instrumental in rescuing them from the *vengeance of eternal fire.*"

If it bear fruit, well. "If these means should be crowned with success, and this tree which has long stood barren should at length become useful, the issue would be happy indeed; thy design in planting it here at first and sparing it so long would be answered; the tree itself would be preserved from the reproach of present barrenness and future destruction, and all my anxiety respecting it, all my toil in digging about it, in pruning and cultivating it would be infinitely rewarded: its fruitfulness hereafter might in some

NOTE.

* Few passages of scripture are attended with more difficulty than this, and there are few in the explication of which the ingenuity of the learned has been more exercised. But amidst the variety of opinion entertained by commentators, none appears more simple in itself, nor more agreeable to the analogy of faith than that of the profound Dr. Waterland. The Greek preposition which is generally rendered *from* he translates *after the example of Christ*. The meaning of the apostle, in wishing himself *accursed from Christ*, appears evidently to be the following: "I could cheerfully be considered the *off scouring of all things*; I could submit to any reproach or torture which the rage of persecution might invent or inflict, nay, in conformity to the example of my adorable Lord, I am ready to offer up my body to the ignominious, agonizing death of the cross, could I only be the instrument of salvation to my brethren the Jews: could I only rescue them from their present delusion, and that ruin which infallibly awaits their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah." Such is the translation which that ingenious divine gives to the same preposition in another instance: *Whom I serve from*, that is, "after the manner or example" of my forefathers. We can by no means suppose that the apostle wished himself to be an eternal outcast from the gracious presence of his Redeemer. This is directly repugnant to that principle of self-love which necessarily belonged to him as a man and a christian: a principle which christianity does not extinguish, but cherishes. Although we are commanded to love our "neighbours as ourselves," neither reason, nor revelation requires us to love our neighbour better than ourselves.

measure compensate for all the injury which it has occasioned to thy vineyard by its barrenness in years past." The conversion of a sinner to the Living God is an event unspeakably important and desirable. Thereby glory redounds to each Person in Jehovah; joy is afforded to blessed angels and men, and a foundation is laid for his own happiness through the ages of eternity. "He that converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins." The conversion of an aged sinner is, in a certain sense, still more desirable; the fears of the righteous are thereby disappointed; the toils, and tears, and anxieties of godly ministers are amply rewarded; the artifices and powers of hell are baffled, and the glories of free grace are most illustriously displayed. The forbearance of God is manifested in sparing the sinner so long; his sovereignty in calling him at *the eleventh hour*; his power in *casting the devil from a strong hold* which he had long and securely occupied, also in destroying the force of corruption which had strengthened with age; the overflowing of his grace in giving a free, a full remission of sins aggravated in their nature and multiplied in their number, in snatching the sinner when tottering on the very verge of hell and "setting him among princes, even the princes of his people. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy," says the apostle alluding to his advanced age when called by divine grace, and to the impieties of his former

life, "that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them that should afterwards believe on him to life everlasting."

If not, then after that thou shalt cut it down. "If notwithstanding thy patience in sparing it from year to year, and all the means which by thy direction I have employed, it remains barren, then its destruction is unavoidable ; at present it serves only to *cumber the vineyard* ; it yields no advantage to thee the proprietor, it is no honour either to my diligence or skill as the immediate *dresser*, and it stands to the real injury of the trees around it." The damnation of those who go on wilfully, and incorrigibly in sin is inevitable. The moral order of the universe requires that each *transgression receive a just recompense of reward.* The glories of each divine perfection demands that *the wicked be turned into hell* ; that the fury of Jehovah go forth against the obstinate, implacable enemy of his government. His forbearance with men in times past, *his good will* in giving them *line upon line*, and warning after warning is no security, but it is only preparing them for a more unexpected and awful visitation at last. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us ward ; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." O sinner, the decree shall sooner or later *overflow with righteousness* and the sword of justice, which has long slumbered, shall ere long awake and avenge

the quarrel to the lowest hell ; and remember, there will be none to pity thee throughout the universe of God. The Father, *who spared not his own Son* that he might spare thee, *will then laugh at thy calamity*, the Son who spared not his own life that he might spare thee ; “ who in the days of his flesh offered up strong cries and tears” for thy deliverance, will then “ tread thee in his anger, and with thy blood will stain all his raiment ;” holy angels who would have cordially rejoiced at thy conversion, who would willingly have conveyed the pleasing tidings from earth to heaven that another child was born into the family of God, and have ministered to thee as *an heir of salvation*, these angels will then hasten to be the executioners of thy wrath, and will eternally glory in thy confusion and horror ; even ministers of the gospel who are now your *servants for Jesus' sake* ; who in the hour of impending judgment stand between an offended God and their offending brethren, deprecating his displeasure and imploring his mercy ; who hold the lives of their hearers in some measure dear as their own, and are willing to make any sacrifice of their outward ease or interest in promoting their salvation, these ministers must finally acquiesce in the condemnation of their ungodly hearers. *If not, then after that thou shalt cut it down* : Nay, so swallowed up will be their feelings as men in zeal for their master's glory, that they will even bring forward the unprofitable servant, and rouse the sword of justice to perform

its office in his immediate perdition. Animated by the same spirit they will unite in the awful imprecation of the apostle, *if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ*, “if he deliberately chooses death rather than life by rejecting the only sacrifice for sin ; if he will by a daring unbelief again and again *tread under foot that body which was crucified* and that blood which was shed for his redemption, let his choice be given him, *let him be anathema, maranatha.*”

As practical reflections have been occasionally made in the illustration of these verses, I shall only detain you with the following inference, that the destruction of the ungodly is certain, infallibly certain. *Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished* ; and alas, brethren, are there not some, are there not many such in the midst of us ? Suppose that the great Lord of the vineyard should this day pass through this part of his heritage, how many *barren fig-trees* might he behold ; some that have stood ten or twenty, others that have been thirty or forty years under the means of cultivation without any sensible advantage ? Has he not appointed one DRESSER and a second and a third to *dig about them*, to use every means which might probably be effectual for rendering them profitable, but where are their appearances of fruit ? “When he looked that they should bring forth grapes, have they not brought forth wild prapes ?” *If the axe was this moment laid to the root of each barren tree in this vineyard, how many monuments*

of wrath must appear? Or if all who are spiritually dead were now struck naturally dead, how awful would be the scene? Would not some pious parent be left *to sorrow without hope* over a beloved, yet thoughtless child; or some devout, serious sister bewail the untimely end of a brother, who had lived without God, and now perished without hope? But I forbear indulging these melancholy reflections; I rather rejoice that you are spared another year, and most affectionately exhort you to awake from your security. May *not the time past of your life suffice to have wrought the will of the flesh?* Is all that you have been hearing, from season to season, of your spiritual and everlasting concerns an empty dream? Is the doctrine of an immortal soul, of death and judgment, and heaven, and hell a mere shadow without substance; are these doctrines *high swelling words* without ideas or realities, then *sleep on and take your rest.* Let the drunkard freely quaff his flowing bowl; let the gay sport merrily in the enchanting dance; let the sons of wealth eat, drink, and be merry; let them sleep securely on *their beds of ivory, and chant to the sound of the harp;* let the young man rejoice in the days of his youth, quenching each anxious thought: let the despiser of divine ordinances persevere in this *despite*; let him neglect his bible, the duty of prayer, the institutions of the sabbath or sanctuary, and even deride those who are conscious in observing them: Indulge the pleasing dream, that *to-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant.* But conscience

secretly starts back with horror at the thought ; this monitor within tells thee, and trembles under the conviction, that thou hast a soul to be saved or damned ; that there is a judgment to come ; that there is a dread, unknown eternity into which thou must speedily plunge. Is it not then folly, and madness, in the extreme, to halt another day without making preparation ? The man who hates his own flesh ; who obstinately pines away in hunger when bread is before him ; who shivers in the storm of winter spurning the offers of either a shelter to cover or clothes to warm him ; who wantonly mangles and tortures his own body is incomparably less cruel to himself than he who *neglects so great salvation*. If “ he that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses : Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace ? ”—Brethren, compassion to your souls constrains me to use *this plainness of speech* ; to propose any consideration that might probably operate either on your fears or your hopes. Another period of your time is now closing ; the great husbandman has borne with you another year under the care of the vinedresser : Will you venture any longer in your present unconcern ? I had almost said that if men are determined to remain in their sloth from season to season, the sooner they are cut off the better ; they

only live to the dishonour of God, and to treasure up for themselves a more intolerable weight of wrath hereafter ; in hell they will indeed continue to sin against God, but their sin will not present that colouring of malignity. *There*, there will be no bible to neglect ; no ordinances to slight ; no tenders of salvation to reject ; no spirit to grieve ; no *blood of the covenant* to profane ; the enmity of the damned shall eternally rise in opposition to the perfections of God, to the displays of his justice and holiness and sovereignty and power, but they will not have opportunity of trampling on love so tender, or forbearance so immense, on condescension and grace so rich and astonishing. Let every sinner in *this Zion be afraid*, lest divine patience, worn out with his delay, yields to the demand of justice, *cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground ?* And, be it remembered by all, that as the tree falleth so it must lie, and that for ever.

LECTURE VI.

THE HEALING BALM ADMINISTERED TO THE
DISEASED SOUL.

HOSEA XIV. 4—6.

I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.

I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.

His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.

THIS prophecy was delivered in the reigns of *Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah*, a period truly alarming to the nation of Israel. The cup of their iniquity was nearly filled up, and that cloud which had long been collecting and blackening over their heads was ready to burst forth in their destruction. The prophet therefore addresses them in the following melancholy, heart-melting strains: “Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy as other people, for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God: The days of visitation are come; the days of recompence are come: My God shall cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations.” But the Lord God is long-suffering and plenteous in mercy; his judgments move slowly along that this infatuated people may enjoy another opportunity for repenting and escaping. Amidst the general gloom, therefore, a ray of hope beams

forth in the chapter which we have read to cheer and encourage them. *O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God.* Jehovah in the riches of his condescension, still acknowledges himself to be *their God*. To each believing Israelite he stood in a covenant relation which could never be broken ; which no change of time or circumstances could possibly dissolve ; and to the Jews in general he stood in an external covenant relation : He had not altogether rejected them as a people, but was yet known as *the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. O Israel, return.* This apostate nation is invited back to God as their portion and glory. “Although ye have wantonly and shamefully departed from me ; although ye have changed your God for them *that are no gods*, by mingling in the idolatry of the heathen ; although ye have trampled on my mercies and hardened yourselves against my judgments, yet I have no pleasure in your destruction, but would rather that you return and live ; only acknowledge your iniquity, improve the sacrifice of my Son as the ground of your remission, and be restored to my favour.” Mercy may be pronounced the *darling* perfection of Jehovah ; this attribute he eminently displays in bearing with individuals and nations amidst their provocations, and using innumerable means for reclaiming them. Even after the decree for their destruction has seemingly gone forth, its execution is suspended a little longer, and another experiment is made to see if they will hear and obey. “Go and proclaim these

words towards the north and say, return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you." The prophet enforces his exhortation to *return*, by an argument drawn from those miseries to which their transgressions had exposed them, *thou hast fallen by thine iniquity*. The ruin here spoken of may allude to those scourges which they had occasionally experienced from the Egyptians, the Amalekites and other neighbouring nations; or it may refer to that invasion of the Assyrian army which they were shortly to expect. They are represented as *fallen*, because without speedy repentance and reformation, their *ruin* was as certain as if it had already taken place. Moral causes, in the righteous procedure of God, produce their proper effects, no less than natural causes, and a flood of impiety will be succeeded by a flood of wrath. Although the Lord God is *slow to anger*, yet the judgment of a rebellious people will not *always linger*, nor their visitation *always slumber*. Thou hast fallen by *thine iniquity*. Sin is the procuring cause of all misery, whether private or public; whether temporal or eternal. It destroyed *the old world with a deluge*; it brought "fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain;" it leads on, in their turn, war and famine and pestilence, to sweep from the earth the implacable enemies of God: Sin was now delivering up the posterity of Abraham, who had long been the peculiar favourites of heaven, to a tedious,

a painful, and reproachful servitude in a foreign land. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets." Although the iniquities of individuals may pass unpunished in the present life, because their retribution may be expected hereafter, yet ungodly nations shall not escape. It is only in this world that they exist in a national capacity, therefore this world is the only place of national recompence.

In the verses which are chosen as the subject of our meditation, Israel's God announces a variety of promises to encourage the Jews amidst their calamitous circumstances: But although these were uttered to the literal Israel; although they immediately alluded to their deliverance from the iron chain in Babylon, and their future prosperity and glory; yet they *are written for generations to come*; they may be really improved for our consolation under a consciousness of backslidings, or appearances of the divine displeasure. God is an infinite speaker, and in these living oracles addresses persons of all ages and all countries; the wrath which he denounced against the offspring of Abraham for their apostacy, was designed for our admonition and alarm; the promises of forgiveness and life, which he graciously tendered them, were designed for our consolation and hope.

On the last Lord's day your attention was

directed to the parable of *the barren fig-tree*. I endeavored to improve that portion of scripture for alarming the sinner in Zion ; for exhibiting that destruction which, without repentance on his part, must unavoidably overtake him ; I attempted, also, to shew to the congregation, in a social capacity, the danger of misimproving their privileges ; it was noticed that the Lord God, in his righteous displeasure, sometimes unchurches a congregation at once, *removes the candlestick* out of his place, and leaves them without *vision, without sacrifice, and without teraphim*. Such were his judgments upon the Jews ; such, afterwards, were his judgments upon Sardis, upon Laodicea, and the other churches in lesser Asia. My design in selecting these verses is to aim at displaying the abundant riches of divine mercy, and, if possible, to encourage you as individuals and as a congregation to yield yourselves up to the Lord by entering into his covenant.

I will heal their backslidings. To backslide, in the literal sense of the word, is to slip or glide from some point to which we have attained ; as used in scripture it generally signifies to come short of some resolution which we have solemnly made, or some obligation which we are reasonably bound to fulfil, and is only chargeable upon a professing person or people. The heathen or those who have been uniformly opposed to the Savior's cross, cannot be guilty of backsliding, because they have nothing to lose ; having never attained to any thing in the church of the Living God,

there is nothing either in principle or profession from which they can depart. But *they* are chargeable with backsliding, who were early surrendered to God in baptism; who were thus brought into the communion of his church, or who join themselves to the Lord by an open profession of his name, and afterwards walk unworthy of this profession; who renounce any thing either in doctrine or practice to which they had attained. Such was the condition of the Jews to whom this prophecy was delivered, and such is the condition of many who once possessed a name in the visible church. *The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the temptations of the evil one,* all combining with their own corruptions, lead them *aside from the holy commandment*: With these they become more and more entangled to the loss of their peace in time and of their souls for ever. *Demas hath forsaken me*, says the apostle, *having loved this present world*: "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition."

Brethren, are there any such in this congregation? Any, who by an increasing attachment to the profits, or pleasures, or preferments of this world, are gradually departing from God; are becoming more remiss in the duties of the closet, or family, or sanctuary? Let such be entreated to embrace, without delay, the gracious promise, *I will heal your backslidings.* The original word which we translate *heal*, literally signifies to cure as a

physician ; to remove some bodily disease, and restore to health and vigor a broken constitution. *Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father,* to king Hezekiah, “ I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears ; behold I will heal thee ; on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of the Lord.” In the present and many other instances, this word is applied to the diseases of the soul, and signifies their complete removal. David celebrates the praises of Jehovah *who forgave all his iniquities ; who healed all his diseases ; who crowned him with loving kindness and tender mercies.* The promise here made to the church, is most comprehensive in its nature ; “ I will heal their backslidings, I will graciously pardon the guilt which they have contracted in departing from me ; I will be merciful to this their unrighteousness, this sin and iniquity I will remember no more.” The remission of sin through the blood of the cross is a leading blessing of the everlasting covenant, and is introductory to all other blessings. The happy subject then enjoys a complete acquittal from his past and present transgressions, a perfect discharge from that curse of the law under which he formerly groaned, an eternal redemption from that wrath of which he was justly an heir, and a title, a legal, unalienable title to future glory and happiness. “ Being justified by his grace, we are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” But the promise comprehends more than merely the pardon of their former offences ; it also includes their sanctification,

or the mortification of those lusts by which they might be exposed to future apostacies. "I will heal their backslidings, I will not only forgive those crimes with which they have been formerly chargeable, but will powerfully subdue those corruptions by which they might hereafter be estranged from me ; I will put my spirit within them, and cause them to walk in my statutes and they shall keep my judgments and do them. Then shall they remember their own evil ways and their doings that were not good, and shall loathe themselves in their own sight, for their iniquities and for their abominations." Whom Jehovah pardons, he also purifies ; he convinces them by his word and Spirit, that it is an evil and a bitter thing that they have departed from him ; he excites in them an abhorrence of all sin, and particularly an abhorrence of those sins with which in times past they have *been most easily beset.* *Ephraim*, who was formerly *joined to his idols*, shall afterwards exclaim with a holy indignation, *what have I to do any more with idols?* And David, after he was brought to a consciousness of his guilt in the murder of Uriah, fervently expostulates, *deliver me from blood guilliness, O God, thou God of my salvation* ; although he was solicitous to be restrained from all sin, he appeared particularly solicitous to be restrained from a repetition of that crime by which he lately dishonoured God, gave occasion to the enemies of his cause to blaspheme, and disturb his own spiritual peace.

The person making this promise is God the

Father. Although in the remission of human guilt there is a distinct act of the EVER BLESSED THREE : The Son *brings in everlasting righteousness*, and renders our restoration to the divine favour consistent with each divine perfection : The Holy Spirit works faith in the sinner's heart, enabling him to improve this righteousness, cordially to embrace it as freely presented in the gospel ; yet the formal act of our justification at first, and of the remission of our daily imperfections belongs peculiarly to the Father. He vindicated the honours of justice, declaring that *without shedding of blood there* should be *no remission* ; demanding that a full reparation be made to the injured glories of the divine government before the rebel be admitted to favour ; and the Father actually pardons in consequence of this satisfaction. *It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth.*

It may be remarked here that the restoration of a backsliding people is really pleasing and glorifying to God. Does the fond parent delight in the return of a disobedient, prodigal son ; are his bowels moved within him when he beholds the penitential tear burst from his eyes, or hears the unfeigned acknowledgments of regret for his former misbehaviour ; does he run, does he embrace him, does he afford every possible expression of good will towards him, and cordiality in receiving him ? Inconceivably more cordial is the everlasting Father in receiving the apostate child who returns through the mediation of Jesus Christ. “ Turn ye unto me,

saith the Lord of hosts, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts : Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you saith the Lord." He does not merely invite them back to himself, but he scatters every mountain of opposition that intervenes ; he answers every objection which might tend to discourage ; "I will heal your backslidings ; when you have multiplied to transgress I will multiply to pardon ; all your former disobedience, your breach of resolutions the most deliberate and solemn, your present unworthiness are no obstacles on my part, and they need be no discouragement on yours. Behold, I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins ; return unto me, for I have redeemed you."

Are any despondently replying, "where-with shall I come before the Lord ? I am ashamed to look up to a Father whom I have so frequently and wantonly offended ; I have no plea which I can mention as a reason why the Lord should receive me who am chargeable with shameful and repeated departures ;" he adds *I will love you freely.* The love here mentioned does not so properly imply this attribute or perfection of God, as the egress or expression of this perfection to his people. Considered in the former sense the love of God is invariable ; he as really loves the child of adoption when he frowns as when he smiles : when he scourges him with scorpions, as when he refreshes with his consolations. *I have loved you with an everlasting, unchanging love ; therefore with loving kindness have I*

drawn you. The promise here delivered by the prophet secures that Jehovah who had long been visiting Israel in wrath would speedily return to them in manifestations of mercy ; that the night of adversity in which as a nation they had been enveloped should be shortly succeeded by a morning of prosperity, and their present sorrow should terminate in joy. I cannot pass unnoticed the sovereignty with which this promise is expressed, *I will love you FREELY* ; “ it is not to reward any worth, or compliment any excellence in you, but to magnify the freedom and immensity of my own goodness. Not for your sakes do I this, be it known unto you, O house of Israel, but for mine own name’s sake.” All the blessings which a covenant God dispenses, he dispenses *freely* ; does he justify the ungodly, “ it is freely of grace through the redemption which is in Christ ;” does he raise to life the spiritually dead, “ it is according to his mercy ; out of his abundant goodness they are begotten again ;” does he bestow the adoption of children to the alien, this favor is shown to “ the praise of the riches of the glory of his grace ;” does he visit an individual, or a church, or a nation with a season of refreshing after they have been apparently rejected or forgotten, *these things are freely given of God.* The word *freely* probably expresses, not only the communication of blessings without merit on their part, but also the abundant measure in which they should be dispensed ; “ I will love you FREELY ; I will manifest my favour with a bounty

becoming a God ; where sin has abounded on your part in backsliding and departing from me, my mercy shall much more abound in passing by your transgressions, and imparting every blessing which your necessities can require ; my grace like an overflowing river or mighty stream, shall surmount every obstacle which your iniquities have thrown in the way ; I will do for you exceeding abundantly, not only beyond what you deserve, but also beyond what you can either ask or think."

The love of Jehovah must be exercised in a manner consistent with the honour of his other perfections ; the demands of his justice must be answered ; the injuries of his law must be repaired before mercy can be manifested to a guilty world ; he therefore adds, *for mine anger is turned away from him.* To consider anger, when ascribed to God, as that hasty, unreasonable, uncontroled passion, which often agitates the bosom of mortals, would be equally absurd and blasphemous ; *he beholds the end from the beginning* ; he foresees every event which can possibly occur either in time or eternity, and therefore can never be taken on surprise ; he is a Being essentially perfect, and therefore infinitely remote from that caprice by which mortals are governed ; but anger, when ascribed to Deity, signifies his righteous displeasure against sin, his necessary abhorrence of it as contrary to his perfections, as inconsistent with the moral beauty of his creation, and his holy, deliberate, unalterable determination to pun-

ish it : the removal of his anger, therefore, can take place only in consequence of ample satisfaction both to his law and justice. *The anger of the Lord was turned away* from the objects of mercy at the death of his eternal Son in their room ; that blood which flowed from his cross, washed away the guilt of a chosen world. “ Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect ; it is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again.” Those lightnings of divine wrath which threatened their destruction, exhausted all their terrors upon the soul of the surety ; peace and good will are therefore proclaimed to them. *For by one offering*, says the apostle, *he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.* The anger of God is turned away from the individual at the moment of his union to Jesus, and acceptance of his covenant righteousness ; no sooner does the sinner improve by faith the obedience and blood of the gracious Immanuel, than a sentence of justification is passed in his favour ; the Lord God who formerly denounced *indignation and wrath* against his crimes becomes *pacified towards him* ; pronounces him perfectly *accepted in the Beloved*, and gives him the most inviolable security to future happiness and glory. “ He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. He is no longer a stranger or foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God.” *The divine anger is turned* from a guilty, backsliding people when they return in the lively exercises of faith and humiliation. “ If we confess our

sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Is Ephraim my dear son ? Is he a pleasant child ? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still ; therefore my bowels are troubled for him ; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

We learn from this passage that in the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, there is encouragement for the chiepest of sinners, for the most undeserving and hell-deserving to return and live ; former iniquities, however enormous, present unworthiness however great, are no objection on the part of God ; they are no obstacle to interrupt the egress of his mercy ; the insignificance, the abominations of the creature only serve to heighten the glories of his grace in their forgiveness and salvation. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; let him turn unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon him." We may frequently notice the greatest unworthiness, the most aggravated crimes on the part of man, connected with the most rich unconditional tenders of spiritual and immortal blessings. *Though ye have lain among the pots :* "although ye have been debased by the foulest abominations of the flesh and spirit," "yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." Again, Israel's God complains, "thou hast not called upon

me, O Jacob ; thou hast been weary of me, O Israel ; thou hast made me to serve with thy sins ; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities ;” the heaviest charges are there uttered against this favoured people ; crimes multiplied in number, and aggravated in their circumstances ; they are accused of omitting a duty the most reasonable and important ; “ thou hast not called upon me, whose favour is life, whose loving kindness constitutes your happiness as individuals, and your glory as a nation ; thou hast been weary of me, by whom you have been exalted above all kindreds of the earth with every blessing both temporal and spiritual : But what is the consequence ? Does a righteous God doom them to despair, and threaten to heap upon them the reward of their transgressions ? No, in the plenitude of his grace he immediately adds, “ I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own name’s sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

In the fifth verse the Lord God gives to his church the assurance of a speedy return and an abundant refreshing. *I will be as the dew unto Israel.* There are no objects in nature by which the influences of the Holy Ghost are more frequently represented than the rain and the dew. “ He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass ; as showers that water the earth. Awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs.” The natural dew descends imperceptibly ; the eye of mortals cannot

discover the *treasures* from which its drops are derived, nor trace their passage to the earth : their effect is obvious in renewing the withered creation, but the manner is altogether unknown. The dew, in this respect, is a lively emblem of the divine Spirit in his operations. Although his effect on the souls of his people is obvious, enlivening them when dead, enlarging them when distressed, exciting within them holy and heavenly dispositions, yet the peculiar manner in which he produces this effect is utterly unaccountable. “Who hath known the spirit of the Lord or being his counsellor hath taught him. The wind bloweth where it listeth and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” The workings of this almighty Agent in bringing home the law for convincing of sin, and the gospel for imparting peace and consolation we can no more conceive than the natural eye can discern the drops of the morning dew. Again, the particles of dew, although small and imperceptible, are most refreshing in their tendency ; they renew the face of nature when decayed ; give a fresh bloom to the grass, cause the rose to expand its leaves and the lily to diffuse its fragrance. The dew, in this respect, most happily represents the everlasting Spirit in his effects ; the moment that his influences descend, how is the spiritual creation refreshed and revived ! All the graces of his people, which were formerly with-

ered and drooping, flourish as an herb under the genial dew; their smell is fragrant as the smell of the field which the Lord has blessed, and comes up with acceptance to God through Jesus Christ. Again, the drops of dew are inexhaustible; the treasures from which they flow are not diminished by communication. The dew, for this reason, is a natural and encouraging emblem of the gracious Spirit. Although his influences have long been descending for the sanctification and support of his church, the source from which they flow is neither exhausted nor lessened; they are as copious this day for the revival of Zion at large, as when they rested in such plenteous effusion at the feast of pentecost, or for the conversion of thousands under the preaching of Peter; they are as free, and abundant this hour for thine establishment and enlargement, christian, as when they early descended upon an Abel or an Enoch, enabling them "to walk with God. I will pour water on him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing."

It may be here remarked that the Lord God is a liberal giver; he delights in opening the treasures of his covenant, and dispensing plenteously to the wants of his people. He not only "heals their backslidings, blots out their transgressions as a thick cloud," giving them the free and eternal remission of their trespasses, but descends as the dew upon their souls, and refreshes them with the consola-

tions of his covenant ; gives them occasional pledges of *that fulness of joy*, of those endless pleasures which are at his right hand ; he sympathises with them under all their distresses ; supports under all their difficulties, and gives them everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, amidst all the discouragements of their earthly pilgrimage. “ The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, he will save ; he will rejoice over thee with joy ; he will rest in his love ; he will joy over thee with singing.” When the christian is straightened, he is not straightened in a reconciled God, in his promises, his covenant, his all-sufficiency or willingness to bestow, but he is straightened in himself, in his own indolence and unbelief. *If he receives not, it is because he asks not* ; for his covenant God “ is able to do for him exceeding abundantly beyond what he can either ask or think ;” his grace is a fountain ever flowing, overflowing, and he is glorified in communicating. “ When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them ; I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the vallies ; I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water.”

He shall grow. This is the effect immediately produced by the descent of the Holy Ghost in his influences. The herb does not more naturally revive and flourish under the softening showers of heaven, than the church of the living God under the communications

of his grace. "They spring up as among the grass and as willows by the water courses. The wilderness then becomes a fruitful field ; the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord," *are* clothed with new verdure and beauty ; they present their blossoms and fruit in due season. How are the souls of the redeemed gladdened under the light of their Father's countenance ; they are inflamed with more ardent love to God and more fervent concern for his glory ; their conversation becomes more spiritual and edifying ; in short, "they mount up with wings as eagles ; they run and are not weary, they walk and are not faint." The christian's growth is compared to that of *the lily*. Lilies abounded much in the land of Canaan, and are represented by naturalists as a flower equally beautiful to the sight and fragrant to the smell. Our Redeemer speaking of the lily, remarks *that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them.* The church and the particular christian are probably compared to the lily in order to express their real beauty and excellence ; to shew that however insignificant in their own esteem, or contemptible in the esteem of the world, they are really glorious in the eyes of angels and of God. Clothed with *linen clean and white*, even the righteousness of Jesus their substitute, and adorned internally with the beauties of holiness they are pronounced ALL-FAIR and UNDEFILED ; *without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.* "The king's daughter is all glorious within ; her clothing is of wrought gold."

And cast forth his roots as Lebanon. Almost every object in the natural, is employed to represent something in the spiritual world. The grass which grows in the field, the rose as it opens in the garden, and the cedar which towers aloft on the mountain, all point out in their turn, the christian's progress towards perfection. In the former part of this verse he was represented as *growing like the lily*; mounting upward in ardour of affection, in heavenliness of thought, and spirituality of conversation; rising in frequent and fervent longings after God as his consolation and glory; but the believer's stability does not depend so much on the warmth of his affections, or any outward attainments, as on a downward growth in humility and self-denial. He is therefore said *to cast forth his roots as Lebanon*, or as the cedars of Lebanon. Lebanon was a mountain situated to the north of Judea, and its cedars were generally known through the eastern world; this tree was distinguished not only by the grandeur of its appearance, but also for solidity and strength. It is therefore represented as a high display of Jehovah's power that his *voice breaketh the cedars, yea the cedars of Lebanon*. The solidity of the cedar, however, did not depend on its towering height or wide spread branches, but rather on the depth of its roots in the earth; thus the christian's safety depends not on the splendour of his gifts, on the ardour of his feelings or frames, but rather on his being *rooted and grounded in Christ Jesus*. "He that trusteth on the Lord is like mount Zion

which can never be moved." The professor whose growth consists in lively feelings, or empty speculations, like a ship without ballast, or a building without foundation, or a tree without roots, is liable to be overthrown by the first storm of temptation or persecution. There is one circumstance which it may not be unprofitable to mention on this part of the verse ; the growth of the root is unseen ; its progress in striking deeper and wider through the earth is unnoticed, yet the tree is gradually acquiring greater strength, and preparing for resisting every outward shock. This remark, if duly realised, would tend to quiet the fears of many exercised souls. They feel not that enlargement in spiritual exercises ; that liberty in prayer ; that fervour in meditation ; that delight in religious company and conversation ; that *joy in God through the Lord Jesus Christ* which they once experienced, they are afraid, therefore, that they *have lost their first love* ; that they are going backwards in the divine life, if not altogether reprobates. But let me ask thee, disconsolate christian, art thou deplored thy spiritual barrenness ; art thou more and more convinced that thy *heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked* ; art thou gradually taught the necessity of laying at the feet of Jesus and depending on him daily as thy *wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*, then I call upon thee not to sorrow as those who have no hope ; thou art now casting forth thy roots as *Lebanon* ; thou art becoming more immova-

bly established in the offices of Christ, in the promises of the gospel, in the everlasting covenant, and thus prepared for sustaining every outward trial. Perhaps the christian never grows so rapidly as when in his own opinion he is not growing at all; although he may be sinking in his own esteem, he is rising in the divine esteem by "putting on that ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price."

It may be remarked on this part of the verse that the believer's increase in holiness and advancement to perfection is infallibly sure. He may be liable to interruptions in his spiritual course. The natural world frequently appears decayed and barren; its growth is checked alternately by the parching drought of summer, and the chilling blasts of winter. The spiritual world also experiences its inconveniences and injuries; *the trees of righteousness* suffer in turn from the summer's drought and the winter's frost; sometimes the refreshing influences of the Spirit are restrained and *the heavens over them become as brass*; again, the chilling blasts of affliction, of temptation, and persecution pass along, their fruit then begins to languish, their leaves to decay, and their usual bloom is in a great measure lost. But this interruption is only for a season. *Their paths shall again drop down fatness*; the Sun of righteousness shall revisit them with his cheering rays, and these *trees of God* shall appear *fat and flourishing*. Sooner shall the laws of nature be dissolved; sooner shall the dews of

the morning cease to descend, or the clouds to pour down their rain ; sooner shall the sun cease to roll in his orbit, giving light to the world, than a promise of the divine word fail of its accomplishment. Yea, christian, all these changes, however awful, shall take place, but the love of thy promising, covenanting God shall remain unchanged, eternally unchangeable. *For a small moment have I forsaken thee,* merely for the trial of thy patience, and to shew thee that this world is not thy heaven, *but with great mercies will I gather thee : In a little wrath,* as a correction for thy spiritual indolence or shameful unbelief, “I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee.” With these promises before thine eyes, promises firmer than the everlasting hills, more immovable than the pillars of nature, hang thy harp no longer upon the willow ; lift up thine head with exceeding joy, for behold thy redemption draweth nigh. “Thou shalt grow as the lily ; thou shalt cast forth thy roots as the cedars of Lebanon, until thou art transplanted into a better soil, a more healthful clime, even the heavenly paradise, there to flourish in unfading bloom.”

His branches shall spread. This promise, or prophecy, may also be considered as referring to the particular christian, and forming a greater security for his progress to perfection ; but it more probably respects the church in general, and secures her perpetuity and prosperity. The *branches* of Zion literally spread, when her boundaries are enlarg-

ed ; when individuals and families and nations are converted to the faith of the gospel. This promise was partly accomplished in the earlier ages of christianity, particularly in the effusion of the Holy Ghost after the ascension of our Lord. *The word of God grew mightily and prevailed :* The sacred leaven diffused its influence from heart to heart, from settlement to settlement, from nation to nation. “The earth was made to bring forth in one day, and a nation was born at once ; for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.” The apostles, armed with power from on high, “went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following.” This promise shall receive a more illustrious accomplishment in “the glory of the latter day.” *The branches of Zion shall eminently spread* when the Jews shall return to the Messiah, doing homage to him as their Saviour and Lord ; when *the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in*, and the whole earth shall be full of his glory.

And his beauty shall be as the olive tree. Natural historians have related little respecting this species of tree, yet there are frequent allusions to it in the inspired records. So far as we can learn from sacred history, it was distinguished by an almost perpetual verdure ; also by the excellence and abundance of the oil which it produced. Israel, in the days of her purity and glory, was pronounced *a green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit.* Zachariah represents the *two olive trees as standing*

upon the right and left side of the candlestick, supplying it with oil ; and in the parable delivered by Jotham, the olive tree is introduced as asking, *should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man ?* The righteous are probably compared to the *olive tree*, to shew that their spiritual beauty is unfading ; covered with the righteousness of Jesus the Mediator, as with a robe, they are altogether *comely*, eternally glorious in the eyes of God ; and supplied with oil from the spirit of holiness, they continue *fat and flourishing* ; they are “ filled with those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.” Their beauty is not precarious like the flower of the field which is suddenly blighted and withered, but like the olive they are ever green. In prosperity they are thankful and joyous ; in adversity they are patient and resigned. “ They glory in tribulations also ; knowing that tribulation worketh patience ; and patience experience, and experience hope.”

And his smell as Lebanon. The nations of the east conversed almost universally in figure ; the imagination of the speaker seizing some outward object, employed it for illustrating or enforcing the truth which he delivered. This prophet of the Lord, conforming to general custom, communicates his message chiefly in metaphor. He represents the christian as growing like *the lily*, and *casting forth his roots as Lebanon* ; he compares his beauty to that of the olive tree, and, in this part of the verse, his *smell to Lebanon*. By his

smell are intended his outward deportment and conversation. As Lebanon, refreshed with the rain or the dews of heaven, diffused a delightful flavour through the neighbouring country, so the christian, cherished by the influences of the Holy Ghost, abounds in every good work ; his conduct and discourse are fragrant to the spiritual senses of each beholder ; they prove *an odor of a sweet smell*, acceptable to God, and profitable to men.

I cannot dismiss these verses without briefly applying them as the source of encouragement under our own peculiar circumstances. Beloved brethren, are we not chargeable with backsiding in our holy profession ? As individuals have we not *come short of the glory of God*? In our baptism we were solemnly surrendered to the Lord, we then became engaged to be for him, and not for another, to redeem our time and our talents in the advancement of his praise, but have we not shamefully failed in performing these vows ? As families are we not verily guilty before God ? Have we been *exhorting each other* with an earnestness becoming the intimacy of our relation as husbands and wives ; as parents and children ; as masters and servants ; as brethren and sisters ? have we been *forsaking* with the imperfections of *each other in love*, and thus living together *as heirs of the grace of life* ? Are we not chargeable, as a congregation, with misimproving our merciful day ? We have not attended to the ordinances of the sanctuary with a solemnity, and affection becoming the majesty of their

Author, or suitable to our own spiritual welfare which they are intended to promote. Have we sat under the ministry of reconciliation with a becoming faith and love, and gratitude, receiving the message not *as the word of man, but of the living God?* What, brethren should be our exercises under this consciousness of guilt! Are we doomed to sink down in despair of a remedy for our diseases? "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then" should not our *health* as a people *be recovered*? Must we resume the plaintive, despondent language of the Old Testament church when forsaken of her God, "hast thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath thy soul loathed Zion? Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us?" Glory to God, there is yet hope in Israel concerning our condition. The Lord God whom we have offended "waits that he may be gracious, he will be exalted that he may have mercy." He is, this day, affectionately entreating, *O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God.* He answers all doubts, he removes all discouragements with the most gracious promise, "I will heal your backslidings, I will love you freely, for mine anger is turned away from him." Have the *heavens over us been as brass*, and the genial dews, the influences of the Divine Spirit been restrained? He is encouraging us with that declaration of love, "I will be as the dew unto Israel, and he shall grow as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." O brethren, are not these promises full of grace on the part of a

covenant God? Are they not rich with consolation to us? Are they not worthy of our immediate, our most cordial acceptance as individuals, and as a society? They are all in Jesus Christ, *yea, and in him amen*, infallibly sure, *unto the glory of God by us*; let the heart, therefore, of every one be stirred up thankfully to embrace them, cordially to rejoice in them. The Lord God is my witness that I would willingly *espouse* you all this day "to one husband, that I may present you as chaste virgins to Christ." Were you constrained by omnipotent grace to acquiesce in the offered terms, how glorious would be the occasion! Is there joy in heaven at the conversion of a single sinner, what would be the transports of its blessed inhabitants, was a whole congregation returning and *lamenting after the Lord*? How rapturously would holy angels mingle in the general triumph, and record that "this man and that man was born therein. Come, brethren, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." AMEN and AMEN.

LECTURE VII.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE XVI. 19—31.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day : And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table, moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom : the rich man also died, and was buried ; And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am tormented in this flame.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things ; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed : so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot ; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

Then he said I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house : For I have five brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

ALTHOUGH this parable is longer than those usually delivered by our Lord, and contains a greater variety of matter, yet its general import is obvious, and deeply interesting. It is intended to shew us the insufficiency of worldly wealth to constitute a satisfying, permanent portion for man, and that outward indigence, although an affliction in the present life, yet when connected with piety is fully compensated by the joys of immortality ; that riches in themselves will not secure the possessor from the miseries of hell, nor will poverty exclude any person from the kingdom of heaven ; that the soul upon its dissolution from the body goes immediately either to happiness or misery, and that where it is once adjudged there it will remain for ever without any future change : The parable is also designed to instruct us that if the present, ordinary dispensation of mercy is not improved no other need be expected, nor if enjoyed would probably be effectual. " If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." But in the consideration of this as of some other parables we must be contented with a view of its general meaning, and the illustration of every incident which it relates need not be expected. Our Saviour, while he would impress upon our minds the delusive nature of temporal opulence, and that the righteous, under whatever circumstances of outward adversity they are placed, have a better portion than this world can impart, chooses two

characters, the rich man and Lazarus, to enforce the truth of his declaration. We are not to conclude that such persons actually existed, but they are introduced for the occasion to urge more strongly the moral intended: And probably thousands might be found in different ages whose life and death correspond with the general import of this parable.

There was a certain rich man. “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof,” and he dispenses its bounties to whom, and in what measure his sovereign pleasure may dictate. It is no doubt among the mysteries of his providence that to some he communicates more than heart can desire; more than they are capable of enjoying themselves, or can find opportunity of distributing among their connexions, while others are denied what is comfortable, or even necessary for the support of their lives. They have not food which is in our estimation “convenient for them,” nor clothes to warm their bodies, nor houses to shelter them from the storm. And it is among the still greater mysteries of divine providence, that oppression and impiety are often “clothed in purple, and fare sumptuously,” while meekness, chastity, and the fear of God are covered with rags, and strangers in a great degree to the enjoyments of life. But in the communication of temporal affluence upon the “unthankful and the unholy” a sovereign God displays more illustriously his exceeding, abundant goodness, and in withholding it from his favourite chil-

dren be more eminently tries their graces, makes them feel experimentally that this world is not their rest, and constrains them to long for the full joys, and endless pleasures of the heavenly state.

That wealth which a bounteous providence bestowed upon this man he appears to have freely used in promoting his own pleasure and aggrandizement. *He was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.* His body was arrayed in a manner elegant and magnificent, and indulged with every luxury which could minister to its comfort. So far as we know the sumptuousness of his dress and living is not mentioned to implicate any censure. When God in his munificence bestows upon an individual the wealth of this world, it is lawful for him to enjoy it in a manner answerable to his rank. His property is by this means circulated among those who live by their labour; it contributes to support the industrious part of the community, and conduces more essentially to the real advantage of society than if his wealth was immediately given in acts of charity. The guilt or the danger of persons placed in circumstances of opulence does not consist in living in a manner suitable to their station; it rather consists in boasting of their wealth; in despising others who are not situated in circumstances of equal ease and independence, in resting upon and rejoicing in their riches as their portion, while they forget that God who is alone

capable of satisfying the desires of the immortal mind.

And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores. Solomon remarks that when “goods increase they are increased that eat them.” It is natural to expect that they who abound in worldly affluence will “be given to hospitality,” and ready to communicate of their abundance for the enjoyment of others. The houses of such are usually frequented by relations and acquaintances to participate of their bounty, and thither the indigent often repair for the supply of their wants. Lazarus, the beggar, was therefore *laid at the gate* of this rich man. The name *Lazarus* is of Hebrew origin, and literally signifies to have God for our help; to have our dependance placed upon Jehovah as our confidence and portion. The consideration that he was poor and miserable in this world, through the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost, constrained Lazarus to seek an unfading inheritance in the world to come. Thousands will without doubt have reason to thank God through eternity for the afflictions, and disappointments, and bereavements which they experience upon earth. Their temporal poverty is overruled for their eternal gain, and their temporal troubles and sorrows for their everlasting consolation. By a succession of outward adversities they are led to consider this life as merely a “pilgrimage;” to realize the emptiness and precariousness of all its enjoyments, and to elevate their

thoughts and affections towards heaven as their only inheritance and home. The widow under the pressure of outward affliction and perplexity is led to rely on Jehovah as her *Husband*; the fatherless amidst their outward privations to seek the sympathies and supports of a Father in heaven, and the poor, and he "that hath no helper" on earth are driven by a blessed necessity to depend for counsel and comfort on the Ever-living, Ever-loving Jesus as a "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." The apostle therefore informs us that "God hath chosen the poor in this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom;" he does not choose them because they are poor, but he frequently keeps them poor and "troubled on every side" as this condition is most conducive to their spiritual interests. But it may not be unseasonable to remark, that neither riches nor poverty; neither prosperity nor adversity, will be effectual to the salvation of man without the omnipotence of free grace to co-operate with these external circumstances, and give the sanctified use of them. As we often see the outwardly prosperous proud, oppressive, arrogant, and devoted to sensual pleasure, we frequently see those who languish in adversity appearing envious, discontented, and repining at their lot.

This beggar was laid at the gate of the rich man. To the honour of the age, and more especially of the country in which we live, there are few who really suffer through a want of the necessaries of life. Charitable

institutions are established, and accommodations are furnished at the public expense to supply the necessities of those who through indisposition of body, or mental derangement, are incapable of providing for themselves. But the poor and infirm have not been thus favoured in every country and in all ages. Lazarus, without ability to provide for himself, and without support at the expense of a benevolent public, *was laid at the gate* of another. Among the nations of the east, and particularly among the Jews, justice was ordinarily administered at their gates, and there also their charities were dispensed. We are thus informed in the history of the apostles that a "certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple." Agreeably to the custom of the country Lazarus was carried to the gate of the rich man; perhaps he was conveyed there at his own request, or perhaps he was carried voluntarily by others who desired to be relieved from the pain of witnessing his distress, or the expense of ministering to his wants. They probably thought that while the rich man was walking around for his amusement, secretly congratulating himself on the abundance of his fortune, on the magnificence of his palace, on the sumptuousness of his living, and the splendour of his equipage, his eye might possibly fasten on this spectacle of poverty and wo; his eye might affect his heart; he might perhaps be

melted into compassion, and thus moved to relieve him. It was natural for them to hope that the rich man in recollecting the luxuries of his own table, would communicate to one who was destitute of a crumb to satisfy his hunger, or in contemplating the costliness of his own habitation he would pity one who had not a shelter from the storm, and in looking at the purple and fine linen which adorned his own body, he might be induced to afford a humbler garment for the man who wanted even a covering of rags.

The penury and wretchedness of Lazarus were aggravated by the additional calamity of a loathsome disease upon his body, *he was full of sores*. It is an ancient remark that "afflictions rarely occur alone." In the divine administration a complication of trials is often inflicted upon the righteous at the same time or in rapid succession to each other. One messenger had scarcely finished his tidings of woe to the patriarch Job, until another appeared for the delivery of his. By these complicated trials, either together or in close succession, a holy Father humbles the children of his love; he lays them low at the feet of his sovereignty; he alienates their affections from earth, and renders them not merely willing, but *desirous* to "depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." The New-Testament prophet in surveying the inhabitants of the heavenly world, represents them as "coming

out of great tribulation, and washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb." This heir of the everlasting kingdom in addition to all his other afflictions is *full of sores*. He was probably smitten with a leprosy, an inveterate, and very offensive disease, which was common in the hot countries of the east, and this malady probably became more malignant through the want of suitable and seasonable relief. How multiplied and bitter are the fruits of our departure from the Living God! How nameless are those diseases of body, and those anxieties and distractions of mind to which it exposes even the generation of the righteous in their journey through the wilderness of this world! "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble." Lazarus, although *covered with sores*, was destitute of those enjoyments which are essential to comfort even in the season of health, which are doubly necessary in the hour of adversity, and which when duly administered tend to soften the rigour of disease, and sweeten the cup of earthly sorrow. For it is mentioned,

That he *desired to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table*. The wants and the wishes of man are in a great measure regulated by his outward condition. The hearts of the prosperous, and opulent, and honourable almost necessarily become elated; they naturally expect great things, and feel mortified and irritated by the least disappointment in their wishes: And amidst a

complication of afflictions, the mind as naturally becomes depressed. Stroke of adversity after stroke tends to prostrate every "high towering imagination;" to humble the heart, to moderate its desires, to lower its expectations and aims, and prepare it for almost any degree of bereavement and humiliation. Lazarus, therefore, instead of asking admission into the palace of the rich man, or a seat at his table to share of his sumptuous entertainment, lay with apparent contentment at his gate, and was willing to receive a few *crumbs as they fell from his board*. The real necessities of man are comparatively few: A plain garment, and simple diet, and a humble habitation answer all the demands of our nature in its primitive state. It is the licentiousness of what is termed civilized life which has so much multiplied our wants, and rendered needful that variety and sumptuousness of meats and drinks with which our tables are ordinarily crowded. Very probably the *crumbs* which were the portion of this poor man, relished as exquisitely to him, and with the advantages of a healthful body, might have proved as nourishing as to the rich man were all those luxuries which from day to day were served up for his enjoyment.

Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. It is the opinion of some that this circumstance is mentioned as an alleviation of the miseries of Lazarus, but we rather think that it is noticed as an aggravation of his wretchedness, and is designed to exhibit his situation in a light more melancholy and melting.

As he had no house to protect him from the storm, nor bed on which to repose his body when tortured with disease or shivering with cold, nor bread to allay the cravings of hunger, neither was he visited by a "master of the healing art" with a tender hand to bind up his wounds, and pour in the "oil and the wine :" The only relief of this nature which he experienced was afforded by *the dogs*, the attention of which as they passed along the street was attracted by this spectacle of human wo.

Let us be admonished from this narrative, never to judge of the real merit or demerit of others, nor of their standing in the divine estimation from their outward appearance. When we see any doomed pre-eminently to adversity and sorrow; poor in condition, diseased in body, destitute of friends, apparently neglected and despised by all, we are frequently rash in our conclusions relative to their real character; we are prone to imagine that they must have been singular monuments of impiety, and are therefore marked out in a singular degree, as monuments of the divine indignation. But reasonings of this nature are equally uncharitable and unscriptural. The Son of God was perfectly *holy*; he was the admiration of angels, and infinitely beloved of the Father, and yet he was "oppressed and he was afflicted; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Jeremiah was a favourite prophet of Jehovah, yet borne down by various and

sore adversities, he exclaims, “ I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath ; he hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter my reins : he hath filled me with bitterness ; he hath made me drunken with wormwood. Behold, and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow—wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger ? ” In looking upon the outward condition of men, let us recollect that “ all things come alike to all ; that there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked ; that no man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before them.” In the parable before us we see a child of God, and an heir of glory *full of sores*, excluded from the society of men ; *laid at the gate of another* ; depending for a scanty subsistence, on the *crumbs which fell from his table* ; with no covering but the canopy of heaven ; with no place of repose but the naked surface of the earth ; with no friend to shorten the tedious hours with his cheering conversation, or with the sympathetic tear to sooth the anguish of his pain.

But although “ many are the afflictions of the righteous, the Lord delivereth him out of them all.” The body of Lazarus which had often bleached in the wintry storm, or been scorched under a summers sun ; which had pined alternately with hunger, or been tortured with pain, and had now become loathsome by disease, at last found a respite from all its miseries, and a peaceful repose in the arms of death. For it is mentioned in the following verse, *and it came to pass that*

the beggar died. After his patience had full room for exercise under his diversified, and long-continued sorrows ; after the reality of his faith was sufficiently proved by a meek, unmurmuring submission to the rod of his Father, death, which to the ungodly, is the “ king of terrors,” came to him as the messenger of consolation and peace ; it came to inform him that his “ warfare was accomplished ;” that his toils, and mortifications, and sorrows which had been long protracted were now terminated for ever ; that his present poverty should soon be forgotten in the possession of *unsearchable riches* ; that his body which had been deformed and degraded by disease should soon slumber in the grave, and afterwards arise to incorruption and glory, and instead of desiring to be *fed with crumbs* he should “ hunger no more, but the Lamb in the midst of the throne should henceforth feed him, and lead him into living fountains of water, and God should wipe away all tears from his eyes.”

You have probably noticed that, although the death of Lazarus is mentioned, there is no account of his burial. His body would no doubt be interred for the comfort and safety of society, yet it was probably done with little ceremony or expense : It is not to be supposed that one, whose situation was forlorn and friendless in the extreme during his life, would receive many marks of either respect or affection after his death. But however neglected his body might be by

fellow men on earth, his soul was the object of particular solicitude to a higher order of beings in heaven, for

He was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. It is mentioned that the *beggar died and was carried by the angels*, although no more than the soul is implied, probably to instruct us that the soul may be considered as the man, and that "it is well with us when it is well with the soul." The body remains inactive; is not susceptible either of pleasure or pain from the period of death until the period of the resurrection, and it is therefore comparatively a trifling consideration where it is deposited, or in what circumstances. But the soul is a principle necessarily active; death, instead of suspending its energies, or interrupting its employments, only wafts it to a region where it will have more ample room for the expansion of its powers, and be for ever becoming more capable of sustaining a greater "weight of glory," or of reproach. It is therefore a question of unspeakable importance to ascertain what is to be the destiny of this intellectual, immortal principle after its separation from the body. The soul of this poor man was *carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.* This was a phrase common among the Jews. When a person of exemplary piety, and distinguished usefulness, departed from the present world, he was represented as going to *Abraham*. In this passage there is evidently an allusion to the manner in which the Jews were ordinarily arranged at their

public entertainments. They sat, or reclined upon couches when the person of greatest distinction was placed at the head, and the others, agreeably to their rank, sat in order, each leaning gently upon the breast or bosom of him who sat immediately above him. Thus at the last passover which was celebrated previous to the crucifixion, John, the beloved disciple, *leaned on the breast of our Lord at supper.* Lazarus is therefore said to be carried to *Abraham's bosom* not merely to express the certainty of his admission to the "marriage supper of the Lamb," but also his high distinction in the regions of bliss; that he had not only obtained *an entrance* into the heavenly state, but was promoted to a seat near to the "Father of the faithful." As there will be different degrees of glory in the future world, these degrees will not be conferred on account of temporal wealth, or rank, or any other present advantages. *There are first* in the possession of worldly honours, probably first as dignitaries in the church on earth who will be last and lowest in the immunites of the heavenly kingdom. In proportion to that measure of grace to which any person attains in this life will be the measure of glory awarded in the life to come.

It is obvious from this part of the parable, that the redeemed in the sanctuary above will be brought to the most intimate acquaintance and the most endearing communion with each other. We are naturally formed for social enjoyment; the spiritual consolations of the righteous in the present state are promoted in

no inconsiderable degree by their occasional intercourse ; by associating with each other as brethren and sisters of the same family, and mingling their hearts and their voices in the exercises of praise, and prayer, and familiar conversation on the things which involve their present peace and future hopes. In these friendly, unreserved intercourses all their graces expand, and their hearts *burn* with a love more ardent to their common Saviour, and to each other. But the pleasures of social intercourse will be inconceivably heightened in the heavenly state, where every jar and jealousy will cease for ever ; where they shall see *eye to eye* in the perception of every truth about which they differ in this imperfect state ; where they shall occupy the same heavenly city ; encircle the same throne, and unite eternally in their acclamations of gratitude *to him that washed them from their sins in his own blood.* Thus the apostle represents the believer in his admission to heaven, as “coming to the spirits of just men made perfect,” and our Saviour mentions that “many shall come from the east, and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”

How great and sudden the transition experienced by Lazarus, who had long been a spectacle of reproach and wretchedness ! Lately he was the companion of *dogs*, now legions of angels are his guides and guardians to the regions of bliss. Formerly the damp, cold earth was his residence, now he reposes on the *bosom of Abraham* : Then a few *crumbs*

were his humble, scanty fare, now he occupies a mansion in the kingdom of his Father, and participates "fulness of joy in his presence :" " He hungers no more, neither thirsts any more ;" he has reached those regions where " God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying ; neither shall there be any more pain ; for the former things are passed away." What emotions of wonder, and gratitude, and joy must have transported the soul of this *beggar* when, upon his entrance within the gates of the new Jerusalem, he contrasted the past with the present, and then looked forward to his future, eternal prospects ! The toils of his earthly pilgrimage would only serve to render more grateful his celestial repose. Each recollection of his miseries in time would tend to enhance those felicities and glories to the possession of which he was now brought for eternity. What songs of thanksgiving, and praise, must have spontaneously bursted forth from his lips to that marvelous, matchless, unmerited grace which had selected as its object one so *poor*, so *miserable*, and despised ! Which had exalted him from the open street to sit with patriarchs, and prophets, and seraphims, and cherubims. Believer in Jesus, what folly, what weakness is it, to be much moved by all the poverty, or bereavements, or tribulations which thou art called to endure in this world ! Thy present afflictions are light and momentary, and will hereafter be exchanged for an exceeding, and eternal weight of glory ; and thou know-

est not how soon all the blessedness which awaits thee will be fully realized. Thou knowest not the year, or the month, or the hour when thou wilt leave the horrors of this barren, dreary, howling wilderness for that *rest*, that undisturbed, unending *rest which remains for the people of God.*

“But far above what eye, or ear,
Or fancy’s soaring flight can yield,
Are the rich treasures of the skies,
The glory yet to be reveal’d.

To tell of those high seats of bliss,
The Seraph’s song imperfect proves;
The builder is the Mighty God,
The mansions are for those he loves.”

The rich man also died. “I know,” says the patriarch Job, appealing to Jehovah his Creator and absolute Disposer, “I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.” The monarch of the grave makes no discrimination; he recognizes no distinction of age, or rank, or fortune, or beauty, or strength. The path of opulence and honour, and the path of poverty and obscurity lead equally to the tomb. Where are now the heroes of ancient or of modern times whose names spread terror over the nations of the world in their respective ages? They have in their turn approached and done homage before the shrine of this king of terrors. The dust of a Cæsar and an Alexander has mouldered, and is now mingled with the dust of the most insignificant soldier who fought under their standards. As

the prowess of the warrior will not appal, so the glare of the wealthy will not dazzle the eyes of the monarch of the grave, nor bribe him into terms of conciliation. "There is no man that hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war." *This rich man also died.* His residence in the splendid palace is succeeded by a residence in the damp and dreary vault: His *purple robe, and fine linen* are exchanged for the shroud, and that body which had *fared sumptuously every day*, must in its turn furnish a sumptuous feast for the worm.

How vain is it, my christian friends, to glory in any earthly enjoyments! "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches," nor the young man in his youth, nor the beautiful in their elegance of form. Every conceivable advantage of this nature we must resign at the approach of death, and as to the day or hour of his approach we cannot form even a conjecture. Ye sons and daughters of worldly affluence, when a degree of exultation secretly throbs your bosoms; when you are tempted to eat, and drink, and be merry, from the consideration that you are healthful, and that your fortune is made, and that you have many days of pleasure before you, in such moments of exultation read over this narrative, **THE RICH MAN DIED ALSO**, or that severe rebuke of our Lord, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then*

whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?

And was buried. It was already noticed, that we have no account of the burial of Lazarus. As he had few to associate with him while he lived, there were probably few to offer respect to his memory when dead ; “But the rich hath many friends.” There is a splendour about wealth which naturally attracts the attention of the world, and collects around its possessor many admirers, and flatterers. And although nothing is mentioned respecting the circle in which the rich man usually moved, yet from his distinguished rank, and abundant fortune, and magnificent manner of living, it is natural to conclude that his apparent friends would be numerous ; and it is as natural to suppose that these upon hearing of his decease, would pay their last tribute of respect to his earthly remains ; in looking upon his body as it lay a lifeless corpse, they would probably be speaking of the respectability of that standing which he had maintained in society ; of his generous, hospitable disposition, of the munificence of his table, of the poor which had been fed by *the crumbs which fell from it*, and of the many convivial hours which they had enjoyed with him, feasting on his bounty, and entertained with his conversation ; they would probably put on the livery of mourning ; with silent solemnity carry his body to the repository of the tomb ; perhaps bedew it with their tears, and return talking of the great void which his decease had occasioned in the social cir-

cle. When a man of such opulence, and magnificence goeth to his long home, it is to be expected that *the mourners will go about the streets.*

But it is very pertinently remarked by a venerable prelate of a former age, that "it can avail us little to be admired where we are not if we be damned when we are." *In hell he lifted up his eyes.* How affecting and awful the change in his situation. Formerly he was *clothed in purple*, now he is wrapped in the flames; formerly he lived in pleasure, now he is tormented without interruption: And as death proved to the poor man the conclusion of all his privations and sorrows, it was to this rich man the termination of all his honours and comforts. It is obvious from this history that there is no intervening place between this world and a future, unalterable state. After death succeeds the judgment, and after the judgment an unchanging, endless condition either of happiness or wo. *The beggar died, and was immediately carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom*, and the other, whose wealth was his idol, whose portion was the present world, upon his death was doomed instantaneously to hell. *He lifted up his eyes being in torments.* These eyes might formerly have been lifted up in acts of piety; in prayer, in adoration, in beholding the glory of Jehovah, as it shines throughout all his works, in " beholding the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world," and all this vengeance escaped; the soul, through the instrumentality of these exercises might

have been “changed into the divine image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” But he refused to take the alarm in his “day of salvation;” he slighted, perhaps resented the importunity of preachers as altogether impertinent, and wished to enjoy “a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep,” until from the lap of ease he drop into the unquenchable flames. “Ye that put far away the evil day ; that lie upon beds of ivory ; that chant to the sound of the viol ; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint yourselves with the chief ointments,” contemplate the doom of the rich man, and be admonished of your danger ; “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found ; call ye upon him while he is near : Seek righteousness ; seek meekness ; it may be that ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.”

In lifting up his eyes he *seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.* It is evident from this and other parts of divine revelation, that the reprobate from their abodes in hell, will have a view of the redeemed in heaven ; they will recognize their former acquaintances and connexions ; they will see that fair *inheritance* which they occupy, that *throne* with the Mediator to which they are exalted to sit ; that *crown of righteousness* which adorns their heads ; those *palms of victory* which they carry in their hands ; those living fountains of water at which they drink and are satisfied ; and this view of heavenly glory will inconceivably aggravate their own

misery : They will behold, high in the climes of bliss, some who perhaps had formerly lived in the same village or town, who had attended at the same sanctuary, or grew up under the instructions of the same parent or master, and they will recollect that all this glory which they see was once in their own power ; that the same *robes* in which they shine, even the righteousness of Jesus, was once exhibited freely for their reception, and that the *door* at which the others entered stood open for their admission, but through their indolence or unbelief all this blessedness was lost—lost beyond the possibility of recovery. “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” saith the Saviour to the impenitent Jews, “when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.”

But although the rich man seeth Abraham, it is *afar off*: The ungodly are often annoyed by the righteous in this world ; they feel under a degree of restraint in their company ; many an inconsiderate child has felt impatient of the discipline of a godly father ; many an unsanctified servant has longed for the period when he had the prospect of being delivered from the controul and admonitions of a holy master ; prayerless and christless hearers are frequently fatigued, or even disgusted with the repeated expostulations of a pious pastor who “travails as it were in birth” for their salvation. The thoughtless sinner is often ready to address his spiritual bene-

factor in the language of Felix to Paul, “Go thy way for this time,” or perhaps more readily to reply, “thou art an offence to me : If I drink, if I swear, if I profane the sabbath, if I neglect the ordinances of the sanctuary, if I spend my evenings at the gambling table, or in the sportive dance, and at last die as I live, the injury is done only to myself. But this offence will soon cease for ever. The hour is coming when the infatuated, incorrigible sinner will be exempted eternally from all the annoyance of the reproofs and entreaties of their holy connexions. They will be separated from them as widely as hell is from heaven ; they will indeed behold them, but they will behold them, as this rich man beheld Abraham, *afar off*. To the one class the Judge will denounce “depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels ;” but to the other he will say, “come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

The next verse exhibits a very moving picture of the misery of the rich man, and his expostulation with the patriarch for relief. *And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.* In order more successfully to urge his petition, he addresses Abraham in the tender relation of a Father. He desired thus to remind the patriarch that he was his son, “according to the flesh ;” that he had belonged to the na-

tion of Israel, to "whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and—the promises." Probably on this intimate connexion with the Father of the faithful, he had founded his hopes of future salvation. He fondly flattered himself that, as he was Abraham's seed, so nearly related to one from whom the Saviour was to descend, and in whom "all the families of the earth were to be blessed," his prayer must be heard. *Father Abraham, have mercy on me;* "while you exult in the full fruition of celestial bliss, cast a pitying eye upon one who is tormented in the flames, and in looking down upon my anguish, consider me as not merely your kinsman, your brother belonging to the same family of man, but as your descendant, and son by natural generation, and when you recognize my relation to you, compassionate my miseries and interpose for my relief."

What multitudes are there who despise all serious instruction in the season of health and prosperity ! They scorn to submit to the advices of the friends, or the ministers of religion. The most favourable opinion which they entertain of the christian, is, that he is an honest, well-disposed man, but weak and enthusiastic; that he is under the influence of a disordered mind, a slave to imaginary terrors, and by his unseasonable advices would interrupt the social pleasures and amusements of others. But, oh, how different are their language and their conduct in the closing scenes of life ! When affliction seizes them ; when death pours its chilling

horrors into their consciences, and they have the prospect of a speedy appearance before the tribunal of their God, they revive at the sight of a minister of Jesus; they eagerly listen to his counsels; they solicit an interest in his supplications; they will be ready to expostulate, *Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and pray to the Lord for me*, that my former impieties may not be laid to my charge. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and my soul is not saved."

And send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. Men, when reduced to circumstances of extreme distress, and without ability to effect their own deliverance, are ready to accept relief from any direction, or by any instrument. Lazarus had formerly been many degrees his inferior; he had been lying as a suppliant at his gate, spreading before him his abject necessities, and receiving with gratitude a few *crumbs from his table*, but now how changed his condition and his feelings! He is willing in his turn to be prostrated at the feet of Lazarus, and through his instrumentality to receive a momentary respite of his pain. It is worthy of notice that the rich man does not ask an entire exemption from his present torments; he does not ask an utter escape from the prison of hell, in which he was now shut up; he was probably sufficiently acquainted with the divine purposes to know that this was impossible; he knew that his condition was finally and everlasting fixed, and that

there remained for him nothing but a “certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation :” He only expostulates for a temporary abatement of his misery. How is it to be deplored, deplored with tears, that rational man will not take warning in season, and “flee from the wrath to come !” Formerly all the angels were ready to become “ministering spirits” to him in every distress and danger, now he would fondly accept the interposition of a feeble mortal : Formerly the “river of life” rolled plenteously before him, and he was invited, and entreated to arise, and drink, and live for ever, now he supplicates for a *drop of water* to cool his tongue amidst the torment of the flame : Once unending glory and happiness were offered to him—offered “without money or price,” now he would willingly obtain the mitigation of his misery for a single moment. How desperate the deceitfulness; how mournful the infatuation of the heart of man, that he will not secure in season the “things which belong to his peace !” “The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed time ; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming,” but man wastes in insensibility and sloth his golden opportunities of mercy ; he dreams of *peace and safety* until sudden destruction cometh upon him, and in *hell he lifeth up his eyes being in torments*. O sinner, recollect that NOW is the accepted time ; NOW is the day of salvation.

" See, Jesus stands with open arms,
He calls, he bids you come ;
Sloth keeps you back, and fear alarms,
But see, there yet is room.

In him the Father reconcil'd,
Invites your souls to come ;
The rebel shall be call'd a child,
And kindly welcom'd home.

O come, and with his children taste
The blessings of his love,
While hope attends the sweet repast,
Of nobler joys above."

LECTURE VIII.



THE SAME PARABLE CONTINUED.

WE have been occupied in contemplating the torments of the rich man in hell, and his application to Abraham to interfere in his behalf. In the twenty-fifth verse, which we now proceed to illustrate, we have the respectful, yet discouraging reply which the patriarch returns to him. *But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.* *Son, remember.* The patriarch still recognizes the tender relation which had formerly existed between them; he acknowledges him amidst all the degradation and wretchedness of his present condition to be his descendant by natural generation, his "kinsman according to the flesh." We ought never to be ashamed of our relations, nor disown the natural ties by which we are connected, however obscure their outward condition, or even however impure or irreligious their lives. Parents cannot controul the destinies of their children, nor reclaim them from the paths of impiety and vice; the devout sister cannot by all her importunity recover from "the error of his ways" a profligate brother, although his soul may appear dear to her as her own. It is Jehovah's prerogative to enlighten the blinded understanding; to startle the seared conscience; to soften the obdurate heart; to

sanctify the impure affections, and rescue a sinner from the “bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.”

But the recollection of that intimate relation which had once existed does not move the patriarch to sympathize with this man in his misery, nor question the rectitude of the divine procedure in those sufferings which he was now doomed to endure. The righteous will hereafter acquiesce fully in the condemnation of those who remain incorrigible in their trespasses, however near the relation which now binds them together. In love to God, and in zeal for his glory, all other considerations will be completely absorbed. The holy parent will acquiesce in the reprobation of the most beloved son who deliberately “hardened himself against God,” and the faithful, affectionate pastor will justify the Judge in passing sentence against those very hearers for whose salvation he was once willing “to endure all things.” Abraham who upon earth had frequently and fervently expostulated, “O, that Ishmael might live before thee; that all who are mine by *natural* may be thine by *spiritual* generation,” now sternly replies, *Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things;* “Jesus the sinner’s friend often called, but thou didst refuse; he stretched out his hand with the sceptre of peace, but thou wouldest not be persuaded to regard, and now thou art suffering that *death* which is the proper *wages* of sin:” and the same apostle who in the ardour of his spirit exclaimed, “my heart’s desire

and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved ; I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, could afterwards say, I would they were *even cut off* which trouble you ; If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha : If he deliberately shuts his eyes against that light which dissipates the gloom of the grave, and irradiates the path to immortality, then let his choice be given him ; let him sink into the blackness of darkness for ever : If he spurns the only remedy which is provided for the malady of sin, a remedy provided at an infinite expense, even the death of the Lord of life, then let him languish eternally in his diseases.” Actuated by the same spirit Abraham here replies, “ Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things ; it was thy high privilege to be descended from the Jewish nation, to whom were early committed the oracles of God when other nations were left without vision and without hope ; a gracious God spared thee in life, and poured profusely into thy lap the bounties of his providence. Placed in circumstances of outward affluence and ease, thou wast relieved from the perplexing cares and occupations of the world, and favoured with every opportunity of reading Moses and the prophets, and directing thy thoughts to a future world : But all this profusion of the divine goodness did not lead thee to repentance ; thou didst sit down contented with the stream to the neglect of Jehovah the ever-

living, all-satisfying portion of the immortal mind: Those hours which ought to have been occupied in direct acts of devotion to thy Creator, or in exhorting others to fear, and love, and serve, and worship him, were wasted in carnal merriment and festivity with thy companions in sin: Amidst repeated admonitions of the word "that a man is not profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his soul," thou didst walk in the way of thine own heart, and didst say to thy soul, take thine ease, until now the DAY of salvation is succeeded by the NIGHT of despair, that long, and sullen, and impenetrable night, the gloom of which will be cheered by the dawn of no morning of hope: Son, remember these things, and be silent; arraign not the conduct of almighty God, but acknowledge that he is just in all the wrath which he is now pouring upon thee: Every transgression and disobedience must receive a just recompence of reward; the honours of divine justice require that he who, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

The soul in the future state will have a full recollection of all the incidents of the present world, and the various changes through which it passed: So immensely will its powers be enlarged upon its separation from the body, that it will be capable of taking a prompt and comprehensive review of all that occurred during its continuance upon earth, of the mercies bestowed, of the instructions which were heard, and of all the oppor-

tunities of receiving or imparting good which were enjoyed. This recollection of the past on the part of the redeemed will call forth louder anthems of praise to the riches of the grace of that Jesus who forgave all their iniquities ; who cleansed them from all their impurities ; who supported them under all their discouragements, and through all their tribulations brought them to the enjoyment of eternal glory. And this recollection of "former things" will enhance the misery of the damned. It will eternally prove to them a fresh remembrancer of the good which they once enjoyed, and of the happiness which they might have attained, but is now lost forever. In proportion, therefore, as the mercies of any are multiplied in the present state ; in proportion as they are distinguished with the bounties of common providence or the offers of special grace will their torment be enhanced, if these *good things* are either slighted or contemned. None will drop so deep into the gulph of perdition, and with such accumulated wo upon their heads, as they who drop into it from the summit of terrestrial greatness, where their sphere was extended for advancing the glory of their God, and the advantage of their generation. "That servant, which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."

And likewise Lazarus received evil things, but now he is comforted. It is justly remarked "that all the afflictions of the righteous are not hell, yet they are all the hell which

they shall ever suffer." Their trials are multiplied in this world. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." The children of adoption are languishing sometimes through pain of body; sometimes through poverty of lot, and the want of even the necessaries of life; sometimes through reproach from a censorious, or persecution from ~~an~~ ungodly world: Their outward afflictions are aggravated by inward bereavements and discouragements. The light of the divine countenance is occasionally withdrawn; those communications of covenant mercy which constitute the christian's highest joy are suspended; corruption is permitted to rage and for a season to triumph over the principle of grace, and their heavenly Father with his own hand apparently "seeks to slay them." These are *evil things* which all the generation of the upright must expect in some degree to endure in this state of discipline. By these repeated and sore adversities the sovereignty of God is displayed, the evil of sin, the parent of all suffering, is experimentally felt, the power of every lust is more completely mortified, the triumphs of grace are more illustriously exhibited, the message for their departure from this world is more welcomely received, and the joys of the next world are heightened. The bosom of Abraham would afford a more soft repose to Lazarus, when contrasted with the open street where he once lay exposed to all the

inclemencies of the season: Those rivers of pleasure which roll perennial "from the throne of the Lamb," would be relished more exquisitely when he recollects his former penury and want, and the communion of saints and angels in heaven would receive an additional delight from the consideration that, owing to the indigence and obscurity of his lot, he had been excluded from the society of man upon earth. "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" and in the anticipation of eternal bliss: "For his anger endureth but for a moment; in his favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Thy covenant God who in the mysteries of his providence *maketh sore* in this world, will bind up all *thy wounds* in the next: *In a little wrath he may hide his face from thee, and even smite thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy upon thee.* Under the pressure of any or all thine afflictions aim at singing of the mercies of Jehovah; unite in the elevated strains of the once militant, but now triumphant *psalmist of Israel*, "thou which hast shewed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and comfort me on every side; Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for ever more."

In the next verse another reason is offered by Abraham, why the request of the rich man could not possibly be answered. *And*

besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulph fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you, cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. “ Waving the consideration that thou didst refuse to enter, while the door of mercy stood open, or to put on the garment of salvation when it was brought near in the ministry of the word, all intercourse between our place of abode and your's is prohibited; *between us and you there is a great gulph fixed.* By this *gulph* we may probably understand the purpose and oath of the eternal, unchanging God. It is his decree, and his declaration that “ whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: that he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption, but that he who soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” And in death every man goeth to his own place for eternity. The unbelieving and the abominable then go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal. The word and the purpose of God secure to the inhabitants of heaven the endless duration of their blessedness; and these seal to the damned the endless duration of their torments. Thus after the wise virgins went in with the Bridegroom to the marriage, the door was shut; all intercourse between the just and the unjust was instantly and utterly suspended. “ He that is unjust,” at his translation from this world, “ let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy let him be filthy still” is the unalterable decree of heaven. Then the *great*

gulph between the state of wrath, and the state of reconciliation is fixed, so that *they who would pass to and from cannot*. They who are “enemies to God by wicked works,” and they who are reconciled to him in their heart, and devoted to him in their lives, mingle promiscuously in this world; by those common interests, natural, social, civil and religious, which now connect them, they are frequently brought together; they meet and deliberate and decide, but hereafter all the kindreds of the human kind will constitute two vast congregations; they will be collected into the apartiments assigned for them in the dominions of God, and when once separated, shall meet no more for ever. Having served different masters, and promoted different interests, and placed their affections on different objects in time, their destinies will be different through the ages of eternity.

In the next verse another petition is presented to the patriarch. *Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.* This miserable man still addresses Abraham by the endearing appellation of father: He would thus remind him again of that near relation which formerly existed between them, and, if possible, move the patriarch to sympathize with him in his distress. Men are at no loss for either suitable expressions or arguments for prosecuting their plea when they

really feel their wretchedness, and are earnest to obtain relief. If one application is resisted, they will make a second ; if one argument does not prevail with the person whom they approach, they will make the experiment of another. Many offer as an apology for the neglect of devotion in their families that they *cannot* pray, but the duty is omitted because they *will not* pray ; where the heart is deeply affected, language will not be wanting. Did we ever behold a beggar, who has the ordinary use of speech, approach the gate of a rich man, and want words to express his desires ? When the soul is deeply affected with its miseries, the tongue rarely fails to be eloquent. *I pray thee to send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.* It is a question which has been often agitated, whether this petition was suggested by motives of compassion to himself, or of compassion to his brethren ; or whether emotions of disinterested benevolence are felt in the regions of despair. It is not, however, probable that the generous impulse of pity can be cherished in the place of torment. There the wretched inhabitants are both *hateful, and hating one another.* As their bosoms rankle with enmity the most malignant against God the fountain of excellence, they cannot be supposed to cherish the feelings of disinterested friendship or good will towards man. This desire that warning might be given was probably dic-

tated by a regard for himself, by an apprehension that his own torment would be augmented by their presence. Their appearance in hell would bring fresh to his remembrance the scenes of the present world ; "the good things" which he had enjoyed but prostituted upon his lusts ; the overtures of mercy which had been made to him, but either disregarded through sloth, or derided thro' a hardihood in impiety ; or it may be that he had formerly encouraged them in their courses of iniquity ; he had perhaps spent their social hours in ridiculing all religion as an empty delusion ; either as a visionary dream, or the artful impostors of priests to answer their own mercenary purposes. He had probably entertained them at his sumptuous table, regaling them with his wines, amusing them with his wit, and employed those convivial hours in recommending them to take their enjoyment in this world, and not be anxious about futurity ; and he apprehended that these brethren, upon meeting him in hell, would charge him with their damnation, and thus aggravate his torment. The friends of the Saviour who are acquainted on earth ; who cordially unite in the service of their common Master ; who associate intimately in the duties of religion either private or public, and are thus instrumental in cherishing the graces, in alleviating the burdens, and drying up the tears of each other, will recollect this acquaintance in heaven, and this recollection will sweeten their fellowship in their Fa-

ther's kingdom. How delightful *then* will be the communion of those who savingly "minister, and are ministered unto" upon earth, and of those who had occasionally convened to devise measures for advancing the interests of their Redeemer and Lord. What joy must have mutually transported the bosoms of the Evangelist Philip, and the Eunuch from Ethiopia upon their meeting in heaven, and remembering the scenes of *Gaza*; or of Peter, and James, and John, and Moses, and Elias when they recollect the glories of *Tabor*, and their impassioned interview on that consecrated spot, respecting "the decease which should be accomplished at Jerusalem!" On the other hand, they who on earth are companions in impiety, and afterwards die without repentance will recollect in hell their former acquaintance, the evenings which they had spent in drinking, in rioting, in revelling, and other carnal gratifications, and this recollection will render their pains more poignant. "When partners in sin become sharers in sorrow, as tares bound in bundles for the fire, they will prove a terror to each other."

But this request of the rich man is also denied on the part of the patriarch. *Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.* The gospels of the evangelists, and the epistles of the different apostles had not been furnished at that time for the edification of the church, and the patriarch mentions the Old Testament as affording to the humble enquirer a sufficient guide for

salvation. *They have Moses who in his law has testified of the Saviour; who has recorded for the instruction and consolation of mankind, the promise which was promulgated in paradise immediately after the entrance of sin, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent:" your brethren have also the prophets, a succession of "holy men of God," who were raised up from age to age during the Jewish dispensation, to "foretell more clearly the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow;" these by the aids of divine inspiration foresaw that Sun of righteousness which should arise, and diffuse light, and healing, and joy among the nations. Some of these inspired messengers foretold the time, and place, and circumstances of the Saviour's birth; others the manner of his life, and others the sufferings of his death, with that "eternal redemption," which he should obtain for the iniquities of man; that he should "finish the transgression, and make an end of sin, and make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness."* This law of Moses and these writings of the prophets are accompanied with evidence of their divine origin, too luminous to be resisted; and have been effectual to the salvation of thousands and millions—have been to them the source of joy in sorrow, of glory in reproach, of support in difficulty, and of confidence and triumph in death.—These writings they posses in their own houses, in their own language, and in this respect *"the stock of Israel"* to which your brethren

belong, are exalted above every other people under heaven.

Let them hear them ; Let them read them daily and diligently in their families ; let them attend at the synagogues where these sacred books are explained and enforced every sabbath ; let them believe the doctrines which these writings reveal, and reduce to practice those duties which they enjoin. These are “all given by inspiration of God, and are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” These living oracles let them frequently read ; on these let them carefully reflect, and be regulated in every part of their conduct by this perfect standard of righteousness. Such is the injunction of that God, by whose authority Moses and the prophets have written. “These words which I command thee shall be in thine heart ; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” Let your brethren imitate the example of Jeremiah an eminent prophet of their own nation, “thy word was found of me, and I did eat it, and it was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.”

It may be naturally inferred from this passage, that the scriptures diligently read and heard, are the principal and permanent means employed by the living God for promoting the salvation of men. He “magnifies his

word" for accomplishing this infinitely important work "above all his name." They who are *born again* are usually born *not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.* In the devout, diligent perusal of this inspired record the Spirit of holiness convinces the unconvinced; converts the unconverted; infuses life into the spiritually dead, and introduces into the liberty of a son, the captive of corruption. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;" and in reading and "keeping his commandments, there is great reward." We offer not to limit in his operations that Being who works as an absolute, independent Sovereign; who may at his pleasure step aside from his ordinary course, and arrest a *thief upon the cross*, or a Saul on his road to Damascus, *breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord;* but this is not the usual mode of calling into his covenant the objects of his everlasting love. The Israelites were supported by miracle in the wilderness; "their raiment waxed not old;" the heavens rained down manna to feed them, and the rock poured forth its living streams to give them drink; but who in the exercise of his reason expects an ordinary supply in this manner, and equally inconsistent is it to expect salvation while we neglect those means which are divinely appointed for promoting our salvation. "Faith cometh by hear-

ing. We have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts."

Again, we are taught from this verse that each part of divine revelation is profitable, and ought to be conscientiously improved by us. It is the opinion of some that, since the introduction of the New-Testament writings, the use of the Old is superceded; that since the *body*, even *Christ*, is exhibited to our view, there is no necessity to be looking after the *shadow*. It is readily acknowledged that the scriptures of the Evangelists and Apostles possess advantages recommending them to our perusal beyond the writings of Moses and the prophets." The former relate as literally accomplished events which the latter merely predicted. In the one we have only the type, but in the other the antitype, "even the Lamb of God" as actually incarnate, and crucified, and risen, and ascended and consecrated "the Head over all things to the church which is his body." Yet we are not to conclude that the Old-Testament has become useless because of the clearer light which is ushered in by the New. Every part of scripture is given by divine inspiration, and is profitable for the edification of the church. And the consideration is worthy of our attention that the Saviour referred immediately to the Old-Testament for proof that he was *really* the Messiah whom the Fathers had expected. "Beginning at Moses and all the

prophets he expounded in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." How much does the evidence of our religion brighten when we consult the prophesies of the ancient scriptures, and then look at their completion in the advent of Messiah for the redemption, and the descent of the Holy Ghost for the regeneration and sanctification of his people! How is our faith confirmed, and our souls animated to remain stedfast amidst perils, or persecutions, or disappointments when we read the history of Israel ; their deliverance from an intolerable oppression in Egypt, their miraculous preservation in passing the red sea, the repeated disappointment of their fears during their travels in the wilderness, and their triumphant entrance into the Canaan which was promised to their fathers ! How replete with "reproof, with correction, and instruction in righteousness" are the Psalms of David, this narrative of his alternate fears and hopes, and joys, and sorrows ! How are we admonished by the history of Jonah to discharge with promptitude and fidelity every incumbent duty, regardless of consequences ; and how does the same history exhibit the infinite forbearance of a covenant God in "passing by the transgressions of his people !" that although "in a little wrath he may hide his face from them for a moment, yet with everlasting loving kindness he will have mercy upon them." *Moses and the prophets* ought therefore to be *read*. " Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and com-

sort of the scriptures might have hope." Every part of the inspired volume is alike heavenly in its origin; ought thankfully to be received, and diligently read. And in reading the law of "Moses and the psalms, and the prophets" thousands who are yet on earth, and thousands already in heaven were first brought to a saving knowledge of the truth, and afterwards "filled with joy unspeakable."

The thirtieth verse presents to us the persevering importunity of the rich man in his application to the patriarch. *And he said, nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* Man, partly through ignorance, and partly owing to the vanity of his mind, is ever prone to devise other methods of salvation than a sovereign God has thought proper to appoint. He thus erects his own will and wisdom in opposition to the will and wisdom of almighty God. The Syrian Leper rejected with indignation the direction given him by the prophet "to wash in Jordan seven times" that he might "be made clean." "Are not Arbana, and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage." How often does man, in the blindness and obduracy of his heart, condemn those ordinances which Jehovah has instituted as means of conversion and salvation! He is ready to ask "where is the advantage of searching the scriptures at home, and attending at the temple from Sabbath to Sabbath to hear them explained? What connex-

ion is there between these services, and the translation of the soul from spiritual death to the life of God and of glory? What is the advantage of the sacramental water in baptism! What connexion is there between the application of this element to the body and the remission of sin, or the separation of the soul from its pollutions? Or what profit is there in the ordinance of the holy supper? What can be the tendency of a little bread or a little wine for imparting consolation to the heart, or promoting its nourishment to life everlasting?" These carnal, presumptuous enquiries which are often proposed by the sinner arise from his ignorance of a single truth which is founded in reason, and confirmed by divine revelation that "all things are of God." Without his blessing co-operating no means will be effectual for accomplishing the end intended. Bread will not nourish the body without his blessing; water will not quench our thirst without his blessing; medicine will effect no cure upon the diseased without his blessing: But with his blessing giving efficacy to his own ordinance the writings of "Moses, and the prophets," carefully read or heard, "are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." We never heard that a sinner was awakened to saving repentance by the appearance of *another from the dead*, the method suggested by this deluded man, but by the instrumentality of the "holy scriptures," the ordinance prescribed by a sovereign, gracious God, millions have been brought to faith,

and repentance, and pardon, and eternal glory.

But although many are the devices of a man's heart, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand. His purposes cannot bend to gratify the pride or the caprice of mortals. If we contemptuously slight his institutions, or presumptuously follow schemes of our own contriving, then disappointment must be our doom. Abraham therefore *said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.* "There," the patriarch may be considered as saying, "there successive witnesses appear; each in his own age concurring with, and confirming the testimony of those who had preceded him; they were all holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and proved that their commission was from heaven, not only by the purity of the doctrines which they proclaimed, but by the variety and lustre of the miracles which they wrought; these men thus armed with divine authority and uniting their testimony have announced to your brethren, and to the world that with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption; that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would rather that he turn from his wicked ways and live: These holy men also unite in denouncing the terrors of divine wrath against the obstinate and unbelieving; that though hand should join in hand the wicked shall not pass unpunished. Thus explicit, and awful, and animating is the message not

merely of one man, but of a series of men of a succession of prophets who appeared in different and distant ages from Moses to Malachi, and would a messenger rising immediately from the dead probably be more successful in expostulating with sinners to return and live? Could any argument calculated to humble the proud, or encourage the penitent be offered by a new messenger which has not been already proposed by these men of God before him, and employed by them with all the earnestness which zeal for the glory of their Master, or solicitude for the salvation of men could inspire? If your brethren were disposed to doubt the reality of a future world, of either rewards or punishments, how readily might they pronounce such a messenger from the dead as an impostor, and his message as a dream and delusion? If they regard not *Moses* who moved in a station so prominent, who was always surrounded by multitudes ready to examine his conduct, and to expose the very shadow of intrigue or imposture; if they regard not *Jeremiah* and *Daniel*, and other *prophets*, who "for the testimony of Jesus" were thrown into dens, and prisons, and flames, is it to be supposed that they would believe the warnings of a solitary messenger, and he appearing only for a moment. If the voice of two, or ten, or twenty admonishing your brethren to flee from the wrath to come; warning them that their merriment is madness; that their carnal pleasures without speedy repentance and reformation must issue in eternal pain; if the voice of all these witnesses, respectable in their standing and

competent in their numbers, is regarded with mockery and scorn, is it rational to suppose that the appearance of a person unknown, and of suspicious character, would be effectual for rousing them to a consideration of their danger. Your brethren therefore need expect no other means of instruction, no other offers of reconciliation than they are now enjoying. If they in contempt alike of mercies and judgments trifle with the ordinary methods which the great God employs for the salvation of the sinner, he is not obliged to depart from his usual course, and resort to a miracle. Let these your five brethren, therefore, and all others who are yet "prisoners of hope" walk in the light of revelation which shines so clearly around them. They possess a sufficiency of evidence that the Lord God "will render to every man according to his deeds," and if amidst entreaties and admonitions so pointed and repeated "they do not obey the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness," their final doom is explicitly foretold; they must be tormented in the same flames with yourself, and there will be none to pity them, or minister to their relief."

How would my soul rejoice if I could apply this parable for awakening the gospel despiser to a conviction of his guilt, and an apprehension of his danger! Wherever we look around, what multitudes may be seen who neglect and despise the instituted ordinances of religion! They have *Moses*, and the *prophets*, and the Son of God who hath spoken to

the world in these last days, but rarely read them. They have temples of devotion in every direction, but they will not submit to the trouble of entering them. They have seen one *rising from the dead*, even the Lord of glory who was delivered for our offences, but do they believe his message, or obey his commands? "O, ye sons of men, how long will ye love vanity?" Ye who are my "kinsmen according to the flesh," how long will ye follow after the shadows of time to the neglect of the realities, the infinitely interesting realities of eternity? In the parable which has been now illustrated the *rich man* is speaking to you from the midst of the flames; he informs you from his own dreadful experience that there is a hell; and that its torments are exquisite and intolerable, will you not be entreated to flee from this wrath? "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."